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Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Families  
Through Teacher Home Visits

by

Melissa Ann Lucas

March 2017

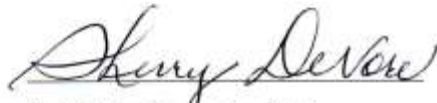
A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
School of Education

Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Families  
Through Teacher Home Visits

by

Melissa Ann Lucas

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Lindenwood University, School of Education



Dr. DeVore, Dissertation Chair

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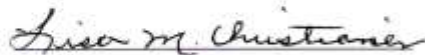
Date



Dr. Reed, Committee Member

3-27-17

Date



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3-27-2017

Date

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Melissa Ann Lucas

Signature:  Date: 3/31/17





## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my two children, Tyler and Cody. They were the inspiration for this document and every document I ever wrote before it. They made me want more for us and made me work harder to get it. To my parents, Ken and Wilda Taylor and Bob Clark, thank you for always supporting me and believing in me. I am so thankful for your encouragement during this writing process. To my sister, two brothers, nieces, and nephews, we have an amazing family, and this paper would not have been possible without your never-ending encouragement and support. I am so thankful and grateful for the inspiration, guidance, and encouragement Dr. Sherry DeVore offered throughout this entire process.

## **Abstract**

Across the country, people believe education in America is in crisis, and the implications are frightening as historians have described the decline of public education as a threat to the nation's economy and military (Williams, 2012). This study involved examination of research on teacher home visit programs. Data were collected through a mixed methodology of focus groups, an interview, and parent and student surveys. Once data were collected, they were coded and examined to discover different themes regarding teacher home visits. The themes included the following: building relationships, diversity and safety, parent involvement, and impact on the future of students. The research data revealed the importance of determining needs and studying each teacher home visit program to determine the best fit for individual school districts. Whatever program a district decides to implement, communication among teachers, administrators, and families must be ongoing in order for the program to work.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Schools need rigorous curriculum and higher standards for teachers and administrators (Ravitch, 2013). Educators need support from the community and the resources needed to meet students where they are (Ravitch, 2013). Recently, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2013) determined American students continue to be ranked 25th in math but are now 17th in science and 14th in reading when compared to other nations. McKnight (2014) reported National Assessment of Educational Progress results revealed U.S. high school seniors have shown “no improvement in math and reading performance since 2009” (p. 1).

This chapter includes the background of the study and the benefits of a teacher home visit program for students, parents, and teachers. In this chapter, the theoretical framework, the statement of problem, and the purpose of the study are presented. The research questions that guided the study are posed and the definition of key terms, limitations, and assumptions are detailed.

### **Background of the Study**

Even more alarming than comparative rankings to other nations are data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013) showing expenditures per pupil in the United States during the 2012-2013 fall semester equaled \$12,296 in unadjusted dollars. These per-pupil expenditures have risen 5% since the 2002-2003 school year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). Even with that much money spent on education, America is still ranked lower than 19 other national educational systems (NCES, 2013).

Cassidy (2013) reported having a well-trained labor force is an essential foundation of economic prosperity, and the United States essentially needs to enhance workers' skillsets and productivity in order to compete with other countries. Across the country, people believe education in America is in crisis, and the implications are frightening as historians are already describing the decline of public education as a threat to the nation's economy and military (Williams, 2012). At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was a direct response to the awareness of changing expectations in the workforce because of the rapid rise in basic academic and technical qualifications for new jobs (Jones, n.d.). Although NCLB has ended, in its place is the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires state plans to include collaboration with other departments and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (McCree, 2015).

McCree (2015) noted these requirements will help states develop stronger connections between schools and careers. The United States Department of Labor (2015) reported although it may be difficult to find a job after high school, students are much more likely to be employed if they have a diploma. High school dropouts earn less than students with a high school diploma and have a harder time finding employment (Breslow, 2012).

A study completed by Northwestern University revealed a high school dropout will, on average, cost taxpayers \$292,000 over his or her lifetime (Breslow, 2012). Breslow (2012) also found dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 were 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than college graduates. According to Porter (2015), "America's educational deficits are driven to a large degree by socioeconomic disadvantage" (p. 1).

The United States Department of Education (2014) reported that President Obama, in his State of the Union address, described what he called the basic American bargain:

People who are willing to learn and work hard should have the opportunity to succeed regardless of their wealth, home language, zip code, gender, sexual orientation, race, or disability. America has long worked to make its public schools ‘the great equalizer,’ ensuring that every child would have the opportunity to join a thriving middle class. As a nation, we must work even harder now. (p.

1)

The most important thing teachers can do is build relationships with their students and the families of those students (Patton, 2015). These relationships can promote effortless interactions among stakeholders and can build a strong foundation so any future disagreements can be made workable (Patton, 2015). As school districts throughout the country look to the future and how best to meet demands, some are choosing to implement teacher home visit programs (United States Department of Education, 2013).

According to Carson and Wood (2015), “Parent engagement is key to the success of our children, [and] now it is time for the public, community, family and school to work together” (p. 1). Jiles (2015) believed students benefit from teacher home visits in many ways; they are happy when teachers visit their homes, are more responsible for school work, and see a purpose for hard work in school. The “Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships,” created by the United States Department of Education in 2013, confirmed high-impact engagement must “build relationships, increase skills in both educators and families and be linked to student learning” (Raymond, 2015, p. 2).



Schools are also using information from home visits to “create curriculum and instruction more culturally responsive and inclusive of the students’ diverse background” (Ginsberg, Nilsen, Moore, & Zigarelli, 2013, p. 1). Teacher home visit programs are showing signs of success; student achievement scores are increasing, student attendance is on the rise, and office referrals have declined (Duenas, 2014). Nevertheless, these successes are dependent upon strong teacher home visit models (Jung & Sheldon, 2015).

Through John Hopkins University Department of Education, Jung and Sheldon (2015) studied 12 urban elementary schools participating in the Family Engagement Partnership (FEP). The FEP was “designed to support student success by transforming the ways in which teachers and families collaborate with one another” (Jung & Sheldon, 2015, p. 4). The FEP teachers take part in 15 hours of professional development, biweekly coaching, and quarterly meetings as part of their Professional Learning Community (Jung & Sheldon, 2015). Jung and Sheldon’s (2015) research of this program indicated significant increases in student achievement, school attendance, and family engagement.

Some teachers simply do not have extra time to devote to home visits and prefer to keep a professional distance (Zagier, 2013). Teachers may also have anxiety about visiting a student’s home (Barnes, 2013) or may not have adequate training to engage families (United States Department of Education, 2013). Not all teachers are required to make home visits; most programs prefer teachers to volunteer to visit student homes instead of mandating them to visit (Duenas, 2014).

The St. Paul Federation of Teachers (2014) conducted an evaluation of their teacher home visit program and found teachers who were fearful prior to their first home

visit did not realize those fears once they were actually in the home visiting with families. The study indicated 76% of teachers who participated in the evaluation changed their assumptions about families and learned something about their students they did not know prior to the home visits (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014). The information teachers learned about students through the home visits directly impacted curriculum and instruction (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014).

The teacher home visit movement started in 1906 when a public school nurse in New York City had concerns about the public school's teaching methods (Knupfer, 1999). The nurse did not feel schools were doing enough to make connections with students' home lives (Knupfer, 1999). Therefore, she formed a group of women, all volunteers, and they visited the homes of poor children and set up reading study rooms (Knupfer, 1999).

Two organizations that have mandated teacher home visits since inception are the Head Start Program and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) (National FFA Organization, 2014). According to the Pennsylvania Head Start Association (PHSA) (2014), the Head Start Program, which was initiated by General Robert Kennedy and Sargent Shriver in 1965, was created to help children from poor families through early education services. The teachers of this program were mandated to visit each child's home twice a year (Pennsylvania Head Start Association, [PHSA], 2014). The FFA was launched in 1928, and with this program came a mandate for FFA teachers to visit their students' homes twice a year (National FFA Association, 2014).

In 1998, the Parent Teacher Home Experience was launched in the Sacramento, California School District, and due to the success of the program and the families and

students involved, it continues to thrive today (Jung & Sheldon, 2015). Over the past couple of decades, teacher home visits have become more popular with school districts and policymakers (Jung & Sheldon, 2015). Jung and Sheldon (2015), through John Hopkins University and in association with the Flamboyant Foundation, revealed “students whose teachers visited them at home were less likely to be absent” and more likely to read at grade level (p. 6).

The opinions and perceptions of one elementary school principal, a focus group of first-year teachers, and a focus group of veteran teachers comprised the qualitative data for this study. Survey responses from parents involved in teacher home visits were collected as the quantitative data. This information was assimilated and used to answer the research questions. This study also included examination of how these programs are being implemented and the types of data these programs collect to increase funding and support.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study**

Edmonds (as cited in Lezotte, 2012) acknowledged in a research paper in 1982 that while educators are responsible for how students function in school, the student’s family is most significant in determining whether he/she thrives in school. Lezotte (2012) identified effective schools throughout the country and then determined the correlates that made them effective. Lezotte’s (2012) findings agreed with earlier research that positive home-school relations are relevant to student success. Appropriate to this study as a theoretical framework was Lezotte’s (2012) effective schools research. Lezotte (2012) established schools need seven correlates, in conjunction with each other, in order to be effective for student achievement.

Parent Teacher Home Visits (2016) stated teachers in California began visiting students' homes in 1998, which improved the attitudes of parents and students toward school. The home visits helped to increase student achievement, school attendance, and parent involvement in the school systems (Parent Teacher Home Visits, 2016).

According to the PHSA (2014), teacher home visits have always been an intrinsic part of the Parents as Teachers Program as well as the Head Start Program.

A large majority of schools require kindergarten teachers to visit their students before school begins (Manz, 2012). These programs have been observed to enhance family involvement in school and lead to higher levels of student achievement in reading and math when entering first grade (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). The United States Department of Education (2013), in partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, found, "Teacher home visit programs honor and recognize families' funds of knowledge, connect family engagement to student learning, and create welcoming, inviting cultures" (p. 8).

Schools attempt to get parents in the doors by offering math nights, reading nights, pancake suppers, dances, carnivals, and musical programs (Fehrer, 2014). The faculty expects parents to be in attendance because the school doors are open (O'Neil, 2014). In the past, school districts expected parents to show up for back-to-school night, but when seats remained empty; administrators determined change was needed to connect the district with parents outside of the school building (Raymond, 2015).

Teachers who schedule home visits gain insight into how this form of communication can improve student achievement and keep parents engaged in their child's education (Parent Teacher Home Visits, 2016). The United States Department of

Education (2013) determined schools need to support the growing number of diverse students. States are setting up programs based on the “Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships,” initiated by the United States Department of Education (2013) in association with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, to help focus “building the capacity of educators and families to work collaboratively” (p. 6).

There is strong evidence to support when schools and families form a united front; student achievement increases (United States Department of Education, 2013). Parents become more engaged in student learning, and teachers have more insight into each student’s background (United States Department of Education, 2013). Schools show increases in achievement and communities, as a whole, grow stronger (Kilgore, 2014).

There can also be disadvantages to teacher home visit programs. Some “studies have generally found that home visiting programs produce a limited range of significant effects and that the effects produced are often small” (Gaylor & Spiker, 2012, p. 2). Upon closer in-depth research, Gaylor and Spiker (2012) discovered disadvantages of teacher home visits correlate directly with the type of program and the training teachers are given. Lezotte (2012) concluded schools need seven key correlates to be effective. Positive Home-School Relations is one of the correlates, and Lezotte (2012) stated although schools can be effective in teaching students how to master basic skills, without parent support, “I can tell you that it is much easier if parents are part of the collaborative team and are seen by the school as partners in the education of their youngsters” (para. 31).

## **Statement of the Problem**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 15.3 million children under the age of 18 live below the poverty level. Students living in a mother-only household have the highest rate of poverty at 44% (NCES, 2016). The future of America is dependent upon the school system producing a strong work force (Rutkin, 2013). Unfortunately, there are several variables impacting students in school, including poverty, single-parent homes, violence, and poor attitudes of families toward school (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012).

Research has consistently shown the adverse impact of poverty in all major areas of development, including cognition, learning and achievement, physical and mental health, and social functioning (Manz, 2012). It is clear in America that family structure and poverty are linked, as nearly one-third of households headed by single women live below the poverty line (Badger, 2014). Poverty touches nearly 45% of children who live without a father (Badger, 2014).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), "Parents' educational attainment and household poverty status are associated with the quality of children's educational experience and their academic achievement" (p. 1). The American Psychological Association (2012) reported families from low socioeconomic areas have fewer financial resources and less time available to provide children with academic support. Porter (2015) reported children from low socioeconomic families start kindergarten one year behind their same-age peers who come from homes with well-educated parents.

Because of this impact, students need highly qualified teachers, impactful curriculum, and family engagement (Beatty, 2013). Investing in student success throughout the school career is extremely significant, including encouragement from schools for parent involvement through effective teacher home visits (Beatty, 2013). Home visits allow teachers and parents to break down barriers and figure out how to relate to each other for the sake of students (Sedelmyer, 2016).

The major challenges facing educators is how to increase students' basic skill competencies and the number of students who obtain secondary education, as this will define economic opportunities for both the students and the nation (Jones, n.d.). School districts, administrators, and teachers must find a way to increase student achievement for all students (O'Connor, 2014). Perhaps there are opportunities for school districts to increase community building through connections with families outside of the school setting (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Students need to know their families and teachers believe in them and want only the best for their education (Flannery, 2014).

School administrators must be invested in the program and willing to lead their teachers and staff for teacher home visits to be successful (United States Department of Education, 2013). Leaders must be organized with their expectations and ensure valuable training is provided to teachers (United States Department of Education, 2013). The National Education Association (NEA) (2012) established a committee consisting of union representatives as well as district representatives to develop a model through which teachers are trained and supported when reaching out to community resources and the families of students they serve.

### **Significance of the Study**

America's future depends upon a strong work force, and a strong work force is dependent on the educational success of students (The Broad Foundation, 2014). Duenas (2014) found many factors contribute to a student's educational potential. Teacher home visit programs were developed so teachers have an opportunity to interact on a more personal level (Patton, 2015), to help decrease the parent-teacher divide, and to increase parent accountability in learning (Duenas, 2014).

Schools are hopeful teacher home visit programs can provide students, parents, and school staff the right ingredients to achieve student success (National Education Association [NEA], 2012). The teacher home visit is meant to be a casual conversation between home and school, not a discussion about academics (Kronolz, 2016). Rather, it should be a time for parents to share their dreams for their child and a chance for teachers to see the student's home, where he or she studies, who helps with homework, etc. (Kronolz, 2016).

School districts understand the only way to fight poverty is to educate youth (Jones, n.d.). Researchers have shown teacher home visit participants know parents are a child's first teachers, and through teacher home visits, parents are able to share with their child's teacher what they know about their child and his or her learning abilities (Dunbar, 2013). Together, as co-educators, teachers and parents can help children excel (Dunbar, 2013). Current literature and research surrounding teacher home visit programs is expanding, but continued research is necessary to support school district decisions to initiate teacher home visit programs.



## **Purpose of the Study**

Parents and schools working together benefits everyone involved, but the impact is greatest for students (Nix, Sinclair, Stetson, & Stetson, 2012). Instead of trying to get parents through the school doors, perhaps schools should go visit parents on the parents' own turf (Patt, 2012). Although teacher home visits take additional time from a teacher's already full plate, the reality is that time invested up front saves significant time down the road (Patton, 2015).

Should school districts consider implementing teacher home visit programs in order to build relationships with families? Do teacher home visit programs increase student attendance and grades and decrease student discipline issues? What attributes of successful teacher home programs do districts need to implement order to build a successful program? This study was conducted to examine the connection between family participation in a teacher home visit program and the impact of relationships between home and school.

The purpose of this case study was to examine the teacher home visit program in one Midwest school district. Conclusions drawn from this study will provide critical information to school districts as consideration is given to implement a teacher home visit program. This study also revealed the need for future research to support the impact of teacher home visit programs. The perceptions of a principal, teachers, parents, and students were gathered through an interview, focus groups, and surveys.

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers in one urban school regarding the teacher home visit program?

2. What is the perception of the principal in one urban school regarding the teacher home visit program?

3. What are the parents' overall experiences of the teacher home visit program in one urban school?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

**Correlates of Effective Schools.** Lezotte's (2012) Seven Correlates of Effective Schools resulted from a study of successful schools across the country to determine commonalities the schools shared.

**Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.** The "Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships" was a publication of the United States Department of Education (2013), formulated using research on effective family engagement and home-school partnership strategies and practices, adult learning and motivation, and leadership development.

**Home visits.** Home visits are defined as teachers visiting students' homes for the sake of building relationships with families and increasing student success in school (NEA, 2012).

**National Education Association (NEA).** The NEA is the nation's largest professional employee organization (NEA, 2012). Since 1857, the NEA has crusaded for the rights of children and educators (NEA, 2012).

**Stakeholders.** For the purpose of this study, stakeholders were defined as the building principal, first-year teachers, veteran teachers, parents, and students participating in the teacher home visit program.

## **Limitations**

The following limitations were identified:

**School district size.** Only one urban elementary school was used for the qualitative research of this study.

**Sample size.** Only 12 teachers were participants in two separate focus groups, and one urban school principal participated in an interview.

**Participant availability.** Teaching schedules and school emergencies may have changed the population size.

**Data availability.** Data collected were determined by engagement of teachers in the focus groups as well as the time allowed for the principal interview.

**Surveys and interviews.** Parent and student surveys were collected by a secondary source and shared with this researcher as part of the quantitative data. Interview questions were created by the researcher.

## **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The participants' responses were offered honestly and without bias.
2. The secondary data elicited through a parent and student survey were collected with integrity by the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

## **Summary**

Teacher home visits are becoming more prevalent across the country as schools look to increase student achievement and attendance and to decrease discipline issues (Beatty, 2013). Lezotte (2012) found positive home relations are one of the keys to an effective school. This chapter included a description of the history and issues related to

teacher home visit programs. The theoretical basis for this study was found in Lezotte's (2012) *Correlates of Effective Schools*.

Educators understand parents may hold the key to student success, but how school staff members access that information may very well look different than it has in the past (Chandler, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore different ways schools are reaching out to parents, specifically through teacher home visit programs. The research questions were formulated to find out how two teacher focus groups and a school principal perceived a teacher home visit program initiated in their building.

Key terms found through the research and unique to this study were defined. The limitations, or the factors the researcher could not control, were listed. The assumptions, or the factors the researcher assumed about the participants of the study, were defined.

In Chapter Two, the history of teacher home visits is explored from 1870 to the present. The importance of involving parents in education was researched, and findings are found in Chapter Two. The ways school districts have found additional funding to initiate, continue, or expand teacher home visit programs were researched and are listed.

One of the advantages of teacher home visits is that the visits help teachers gain a more realistic picture of students and their home life (Meyer, 2013). Teacher home visit programs can assist schools in building a bridge between school and home. Parents participating in teacher home visits are more apt to help their students with homework and ensure their children go to school (Patt, 2012).

One of the disadvantages of teacher home visit programs is the time teachers are expected to attend trainings, visit student homes, and meet to reflect on the visits Sewell, 2012. Teachers and administrators are concerned for their safety when conducting home

visits (Patt, 2012). Different teacher home visit programs involve different types of training, and some programs require more time from teachers (Duenas, 2014). Tips for successful home visits are also examined in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Literature is reviewed in this chapter to build background knowledge on historical schooling practices in the United States. The review was designed to show how historical educational practices shaped today's model of home-school relationships. The literature discussed makes a strong case for equitable home-school collaboration, which includes the dynamic of conducting teacher home visits. This literature review is organized into the following sections: the history of teacher home visits, involving parents in education, current teacher home visits across the country, costs of teacher home visits, advantages of teacher home visits, disadvantages of teacher home visits, and training and tips for a successful home visit program.

The United States Department of Education (2013) reported, "For schools and districts across the United States, family engagement is rapidly shifting from a low-priority recommendation to an integral part of education reform efforts" (p. 5). The United States Department of Education (2013) also noted, "As of January 2010, 39 states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws calling for the implementation of family engagement policies" (p. 5). Following a survey of teachers and administrators, it was discovered:

[More than] seven in 10 educators identify addressing the individual needs of diverse learners (83% of principals; 78% of teachers) and engaging parents and the community in improving education for students (72% of principals; 73% of teachers) as challenging or very challenging for school leaders. ("School Leadership," 2013, p. 6)

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2016) announced the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed by the House and Senate in December of 2015. This act reauthorized programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for four years (ESSA, 2015). Under this reauthorization, school-wide Title 1 programs must use 1% of Title 1 grants to support programs that allow schools to engage parents and family members at home (ESSA, 2015). The act also requires schools to create best practices information for parent and family engagement and to work in partnership with programs with a well-proven record of success in improving and increasing parent and family engagement (ESSA, 2015).

The Chicago Consortium on School Research found when school improvement and student achievement are seen as shared responsibilities among schools, families, and communities, a higher level of respect and trust are established between home and school (United States Department of Education, 2013). The Michigan Department of Education (2015) discovered the best predictor of a student's achievement in school is not, in fact, money or social status but the ability of the family to construct a home where learning is encouraged, where high expectations for the child and his/her teachers are shared, and when parents get involved in their child's education and the community.

Opponents of teacher home visit programs believe suggesting overworked teachers add home visits to their routine hardly seems fair, especially when dealing with students whose attitudes and behavior often reflect the least amount of effort in school (Nix et al., 2012). Teachers and administrators may argue visiting the homes of students could place teachers at risk if homes are in low-income areas (Barnes, 2013).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte, 2012), specifically positive home-school relations, provided the framework for this study. To provide a rationale for selecting this framework, a review of the work of Lezotte (2012) and Edmonds (1982) is necessary. Lezotte (2012) and Edmonds (1982) studied successful schools across the country and determined all children are capable of learning, but schools hold the keys to mastery of curriculum.

Edmonds (1982), Lezotte's co-researcher, published a research paper in which he stated, "While schools may be primarily responsible for whether or not students function adequately in school, the family is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school" (p. 5). This research led to the creation of the Correlates to Effective Schools by Lezotte (2012) and to the evolution of new research that included Positive Home-School Relations. That research laid the foundation for other researchers such as Jung and Sheldon (2015), who once again confirmed what Lezotte and his team of researchers had already determined: building trust with families is the key to successful collaboration between home and school.

The National Education Association (2012) also built upon Lezotte's findings when they researched and created the Parent/Teacher Home Visits Program. They understood the importance of trust and communication between school and home to allow stakeholders to build a community of support for student learning (NEA, 2012). Teachers participating in home visit programs across the country understand what Lezotte (2012) and his team of researchers discovered so many years ago; family and



schools must work together to bridge the gap between home and school for students to be successful.

### **Beginning of Teacher Home Visits**

During the Reform Era, 1870 to 1920, home visits by early childhood pioneers promoted the “development of young children by addressing needs of poor and vulnerable children, their families and their communities” (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000, p. 36). According to Knupfer (1999), the visiting teacher movement began in 1906 when a public health nurse, Lillian Wald of New York City, had concerns regarding the public schools’ teaching methods (Knupfer, 1999). Ms. Wald did not feel the schools were making adequate connections from learning to the children’s home conditions (Knupfer, 1999).

Ms. Wald formed a group of volunteer women who began making home and school visits, and this group initiated reading study rooms for students to link their interests to school experiences (Knupfer, 1999). Because of the increase in immigration and diverse student populations, the functions of the school enlarged to accommodate the “whole child, meaning various student’s physical, social, vocational, and academic needs which resulted in differentiating instruction to meet student’s individual learning needs” (Knupfer, 1999, p. 3). A year after Wald began these visits; the New York City Public Education Association assumed responsibility for the program and hired its first visiting teacher (Knupfer, 1999).

Johnson (1916) observed the visiting teacher experience was undertaken with the belief that if schools could extend their reach into homes of children, better citizens could be developed, many failures could be prevented, and future expenditures could be saved.

New York was not the only school to hire visiting teachers, and soon other cities joined the movement and began hiring visiting teachers for their schools: Philadelphia, 1909; Worcester, 1910; Rochester, 1913; Kansas City, 1915; Minneapolis, 1916; and Chicago, 1919 (Knupfer, 1999). The visiting teachers in these school districts were a cross between a social worker and a teacher (Knupfer, 1999).

During the mid-1800s, the kindergarten movement in the United States "...was modeled on the play-based early education programs originated by Friedrich Froebel in Germany in 1837" (Walker, 2012, p. 1). These kindergartens were funded by philanthropic groups, and kindergarten teachers instructed children in the mornings and went on home visits in the afternoons (Walker, 2012, p. 1). The home visits were "created to teach families about child development and how toys could be used to stimulate learning and how to build community and family relationships" (Walker, 2012, p. 1). By the 1930s, demand increased for young children to attend kindergarten; afternoon kindergarten classes were added, thereby ending teacher home visits (Walker, 2012).

The Future Farmers of America implemented teacher home visits when they launched the agricultural program in 1928 (National FFA Organization, 2014). The Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) is a collaborative effort among the agriculture teacher, parents/guardians, employers, and others to assist students with SAE development and achievement goals (National FFA Organization, 2014). On-site visits are especially important as they allocate time for individual instruction and assessment (National FFA Organization, 2014). It is recommended agriculture teachers make at least

four visits per student per year, which can include summer visits and activities (National FFA Organization, 2014).

President Johnson appointed Sargent Shriver and Attorney General Robert Kennedy to head the Office of Economic Opportunity (PSHA, 2014). They convened a panel of 14 experts to develop a strategy to meet the needs of preschoolers living in poverty (PHSA, 2014). Moreover, "...they envisioned Head Start as a way to enhance children's social competence through a comprehensive program that included health, nutrition, education, social services, and parent involvement components" (PHSA, 2014, para. 4). As a result, the Head Start Program was launched in 1965 as a comprehensive child development program (PHSA, 2014). Head Start, then and now, requires teachers to make home visits to each of their students' homes at least twice a year (PHSA, 2014).

Today, the Head Start mission is still the same: engage parents in their children's learning (PHSA, 2014). Great emphasis is placed on the involvement of parents in the administration of local Head Start programs (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Home visits are a great way for teachers to create initial connections with students and families, and students feel safe and comfortable meeting teachers in their own homes (Patton, 2015).

The "cornerstone of Head Start is the promotion of caregivers' involvement in their young children's development and early learning" (Manz, 2012, p. 231). Manz (2012) also found the impact of poverty on children can place "...them at risk for life-long consequences such as school failure, unemployment, and crime" (p. 231). In the late 1970s, the concept for Parents as Teachers (2016) was developed by Missouri educators

who knew students were enrolling in kindergarten with varying degrees of school readiness.

In 1981, the pilot project of Parents as Teachers, for parents of newborns in Missouri, was funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Danforth Foundation (Parents as Teachers, 2016). The hope for this program was that it would “improve school readiness and parent involvement” (Parents as Teachers, 2016, para. 4). Today, Parents as Teachers (2016) is in all 50 states and six countries.

### **Involving Parents in Education**

Few would argue it is the responsibility of classroom teachers to establish and build good relationships with students and their parents (Nix et al., 2012). The most influential environments where learning and development occur are home and school (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Understanding the difference between involvement and engagement can make a difference in a school’s approach to building relationships with families (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Ferlazzo (2011) defined involvement as “enfolding or enveloping” (p. 3). Engagement was defined as “meaningful connections between schools and their students’ families” (Fehrer, 2014, p. 3). Parent engagement also opens the lines of communication between the school and family (Fehrer, 2014).

Unfortunately, opportunities schools offer for parent involvement may not match the “family’s life situations, expectations, or desired roles” (Fehrer, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, the opportunity to bridge the gap between schools and families through home visits enables students to increase their chances of success in school (Kilgore, 2014).

Students often view school and home as two different worlds, but when a bridge is created through a teacher home visit, the two different worlds become more unified (Zagier, 2013).

There are many advantages to parents who participate in a teacher home visit program (Raymond, 2015). Parents stay in their comfort zone; they do not have to feel intimidated meeting in an unfamiliar environment (Patton, 2015). Parents are more willing to share family stories, as well as fears and dreams they have for their children (Castelluccio, 2015).

Another advantage for parents is they learn more than just how their student is doing in school; they learn what their children are learning and what they can do at home to support that learning (Carson & Wood, 2015). Children from diverse backgrounds perform better when parents and teachers work together to bridge the gap between the culture of the home and the school (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). As one parent stated, “The personal relationship with the teacher is amazing; I really benefitted” (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014, p. 9).

By having the student’s teacher visit at home, parents are more likely to voice concerns and be willing to build a relationship with the teacher based on a mutual desire for the student to be successful (Kilgore, 2014; Raymond, 2015). Parents are able to have positive communication with the teacher and school (Michigan Department of Education, 2015; Smith, 2013), and they feel more comfortable going to their child’s school and being a part of it (Zagier, 2013). The goal of teacher home visit programs is to build durable, positive relationships with each family (Castelluccio, 2015).

When positive communication is established between the parent and teacher, the “cycle of blame” is broken (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Parents are also more likely to become involved in their student’s education, classroom, and school (Project Appleseed, 2016). Smith (2013) shared:

I can’t think of an easier way to begin building mutual liking and respect than to give parents a home-court advantage. Bonds of trust begin to build the moment I walk into a parent’s home and compliment his or her hard work in raising an amazing child... The relationship starts when I take that first step toward the family instead of hiding behind my classroom door. (p. 76)

Teachers believe parents should be more involved in their student’s education but seem at a loss as to how to make that happen, while parents often feel disconnected from their child’s teacher and school (Nix et al., 2012; United States Department of Education, 2013). Teachers may be the experts in education, but parents are 100% the experts in their children (Kronolz, 2016).

Researchers have argued teacher home visits and relationship building with families can provide many benefits to teachers, parents, and students (Barnes, 2013). These benefits include parents and teachers having opportunities to talk and collaborate about the child’s education (Sewell, 2012). Teachers with a knowledge base of the student’s home life and how that home life can impact the classroom have an advantage they might not have if they did not visit student homes (Project Appleseed, 2016; Sewell, 2012).

Benefits may also include parents being more likely to become involved in their student’s school activities (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Parents may take

volunteering opportunities, and students then realize they have the support of their parent as well as their teacher (Michigan Department of Education, 2015; Project Appleseed, 2016). Another benefit to parents who participate in a teacher home visit program is increased communication with the teacher (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014). A teacher who visited a student's home remarked the visits increased the parent-teacher relationship two-fold (NEA, 2012). As a teacher, she felt more comfortable picking up the phone, while her student's family felt more comfortable calling to talk to her; together they could solve more problems than they could alone (NEA, 2012).

The Michigan Department of Education (2015) completed documented research about parent involvement in education in relation to academic achievement. The Michigan Department of Education (2015) found the earlier parents become involved in their child's learning, the greater the impact down the road. Ferlazzo (2011) believed the mission of family engagement is not to "serve clients but to gain partners" (p. 11). Based on the findings of the Michigan Department of Education (2015), parent expectations of their child's academic attainment were one of the most consistent predictors of their child's academic achievement and social adjustment.

The Michigan Department of Education (2015) utilized the Six Types of Parenting Framework by Joyce Epstein to guide them in developing school and family partnerships. Epstein (as cited in Michigan Department of Education, 2015) believed the following to be the foundation of a solid relationship between school and home:

- parenting, helping families establish environments to support children as students

- communicating, create effective forms of communication about school programs and children's progress
- volunteering, recruit parents for help and support in the school
- learning at home, giving families ideas to help students with homework at home
- decision making, include parents in school decisions
- collaborating with community, identify different resources throughout the community that will help strengthen the school programs, student learning, and development. (p. 3)

The missing link between students and academic success may well be parent involvement; however, schools must be willing to build deeper relationships with parents (NEA, 2012; Sewell, 2012). Parents and teachers are co-educators who share respective knowledge about the student; it is about helping teachers become culturally aware and getting parents seriously involved in their child's education (Flannery, 2014). Family engagement should be a shared responsibility if schools are "committed to reaching out to families in meaningful ways" (Fehrer, 2014, p. 4). Stuhrt (2009) stated:

Home-visits are not only key for parents and teachers in building communication with each other, but the students become more motivated after home visits, resulting in higher achievement, reduced student misbehavior, increased parent involvement, and greater grass roots interest in school reform. (p. 24)

In a study by Auerback (2010), findings indicated African American mothers of low socioeconomic status felt intimidated, devalued, and disrespected by educators.

Auerback (2010) determined parents, regardless of race, are more likely to engage if



schools welcome them, appreciate their participation, and listen to them (Auerback, 2010). However, schools need to take the first step in reaching out to close that gap between parents and the schools (Patton, 2015).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), in 2014, approximately 20% of school-age children were in families living in poverty. Poverty is associated with success in school (NCES, 2016). Children living in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to have a lower level of school performance and to experience more academic and behavioral problems (Henry, Mazza, Seijeoung, & Zwanziger, 2013). Students who think failure or low performance is likely will probably never try, or if they do not believe they are smart enough and capable of success, they are less likely to make any effort in school (Jensen, 2013).

For teachers in the St. Paul, Minnesota School District, 90% of home visits are to African-American families while 90% of the visiting teachers are white (NEA, 2014). Despite these differences, “home visits can be a powerful tool,” and eight out of 10 of teachers stated home visits “changed [the] assumptions they had about parents” (NEA, 2014, p. 8). Kilgore (2014) indicated while parents’ supporting their child’s learning at home is critical, a home visit is one way to develop the partnership between teacher and parent and to increase the student’s chances for success.

When students observe parents opening the home to their teacher, students recognize the parents’ trust for the teacher, which allows the students to trust the teacher (Patton, 2015). Reaching out to families to engage them in their child’s education allows them to actively commit to their child’s success in school (Fehrer, 2014). Fehrer’s (2014) comment was confirmed by a United States Department of Education-funded study

entitled “Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships,” which purported building relationships of trust between a school and families with transparent motives and “shared goals for success is critical and takes time” (Raymond, 2015, p. 2).

### **Teacher Home Visit Programs Across the Country**

In one urban Missouri public school, the Home Works! Program requires two home visits a year in the student’s home and two family nights held at the school (O’Neil, 2014). Materials for the home visits and teacher stipends are provided by the school district (O’Neil, 2014). The executive director of this program, Karen Kalish, stated, “We have found a way for people to sit down outside the regular school and have the most important conversations that need to happen” (as cited in Zagier, 2013, para. 5).

However, Henke (2011) shared high school teacher Rachel Ward’s realization that parents become defensive and feel teachers are prying. Cynthia Williams, a fourth-grade teacher, noted her students viewed home and school as two different worlds, but the teacher home visit program “created that bridge” (Zagier, 2013, para. 33).

Researchers of the Home Works! Program confirmed when teachers participate in home visits; it can lead to better attendance, improved test scores, greater parental involvement, and fewer suspensions and expulsions (Duenas, 2014).

According to an article published by *NEAToday*, the Maplewood Richmond Heights School District in Missouri has seen a decline in discipline referrals of 45% with a 20% increase in parent involvement (Flannery, 2014). Flannery (2014) also reported over a three-year period, “the Sacramento School District in California teacher home visits led to 6.5% gain in reading tests and 9.8% in math” (p. 6)

In California, the Parent Teacher Home Visits association (2011) has been going strong since 1998. This project began as an effort to address the cycle of blame that existed between parents and school personnel in the Sacramento School District (Parent Teacher Home Visits, 2011). The Parent Teacher Home Visits (2011) motto states:

...rather than blaming each other, teachers and parents come together, in a unique setting, as equal partners, to build trust and form a relationship where they can take the time to share dreams, expectations, experiences, and tools regarding the child's academic success. Once a relationship is formed, the partners are empowered, finding accountability with each other to make the necessary changes to insure that students experience academic and social success. (p. 3)

At Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, California, school staff, including teachers, counselors, and administrators, make hundreds of home visits each summer (Ferlazzo, 2011). Their philosophy is not to tell parents and students what to expect in high school but to listen to the wisdom parents have gained from parenting their children (Ferlazzo, 2011). Staff members want to hear from parents their hopes and dreams for students, and then stakeholders discuss how the school and parents can work together to help students achieve success (Ferlazzo, 2011; Jiles, 2015; O'Neil, 2014).

The Bentley School in Salem, Massachusetts, has begun to turn things around through teacher home visits (Castelluccio, 2015). Community members in Salem recognized a need to increase student achievement and knew family engagement could be the needed bridge between schools and home (Castelluccio, 2015). Teachers are trained and bi-weekly debriefings are held so teachers can discuss home visits, needs of families, and determine the direction of instruction in the classroom (Castelluccio, 2015).

In Seattle, Washington, the teachers at Cleveland High School are trained prior to making home visits to focus on discovering the strengths of each family and consider inviting family members into the classroom to share their skills (Ginsberg et al., 2013). As schools become more diverse, it is vital teachers and administrators become connected with families of different backgrounds in order to bridge the gap between home and school (Koblinsky & Maring, 2013). The teachers at Cleveland High School are also trained to listen to the parents of their students (Ginsberg et al., 2013). The main reason for home visits is to build relationships with families, which in turn allows teachers to “shine a light on the strengths and stories within the community and to inform their curriculum and instruction” (Ginsberg et al., 2013, p. 1).

In Kentucky, the 1998 Commonwealth Accountability Testing System ranked the Mason County School District 126 out of 176; by 2008, the Mason County School District had significantly increased achievement scores and decreased student discipline referrals by 50% (Middleton, 2008). The administrators and teachers of this school district believed this occurred because of teacher home visits the district implemented (Middleton, 2008). Patt (2012) found teachers and administrators in Macon County want to know about any barriers students or their families may face that affect education. Although it was a hard sell for teachers at the beginning, they have rallied around the idea and have found the importance of making the connection with families and bridging the gap to increased student achievement (Patt, 2012).

These home visits foster the idea that building a community between school and home is the foundation of student success (Flannery, 2014). Hoots (2015) reported the Mason County School District continued to score Proficient on the Kentucky School K-

Prep Test Scores for 2015. After “seven years of home visits, research has found that the district moved from 126th to 30th on statewide tests and that discipline referrals have reduced significantly” (Flannery, 2014, para. 14).

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the teacher home visit project has increased from seven teachers in 2010 to numerous teachers in over 40 schools (Dunbar, 2013). Nick Faber, vice president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, stated, “To ask parents about their hopes and dreams, and to know that it might be the first time they’ve been asked that question and that you’re getting that thought process started... it’s very powerful” (Flannery, 2014, p. 7). St. Paul decided to initiate the teacher home visit project because teachers were blaming parents and parents were blaming teachers for the lack of success in schools (Flannery, 2014). Since the inception of the project, parents and teachers have built relationships based on trust and are now working together to ensure success for their students (Flannery, 2014).

A National Education Association Priority School in Detroit, Michigan, has adopted the Parent Teacher Home Visit Program which originated in Sacramento (Flannery, 2014). A home visit in this area of Detroit can build meaningful partnerships between schools and homes (Flannery, 2014). These visits can boost school attendance and encourage homework completion, decrease drop-out rates, and reduce discipline problems (Flannery, 2014).

Connecticut is aligning its work and policies based on the “Dual-Capacity Building Framework” which was funded by the United States Department of Education and developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Carson & Wood, 2015). Dianna R. Wentzell, Connecticut Education Commissioner, stated, “When

families are authentically engaged and listened to as active partners our students reach their full potential and graduate college and are career ready” (Carson & Wood, 2015, p. 1).

### **Costs of Teacher Home Visits**

Schools may be reluctant to start a teacher home visit program due to costs associated with the program. Beatty (2013) discovered every dollar invested in high-quality early care and education can lead to \$13 in savings to taxpayers. This investment in students over time can close “between 30 and 70% of achievement gaps, depending on how long the students receive the services” (Beatty, 2013, p. 74).

Many schools across the country have found and used different means to pay teacher stipends for home visits. In California, a bill was passed that provided \$40 million in state funds over a five-year period for school districts to set up home visits (Sedelmyer, 2016). In Colorado, state representatives passed a bill that shifted the way they fund public education in the state and increased funding by asking voters to raise \$950 million in new revenue to cover the cost of the teacher home visit program (Denver Public Schools, 2013).

In Washington, teachers are paid \$34 an hour while conducting home visits and attending trainings (Brown, 2013). The Flamboyant Foundation covers most of the cost of materials for families to keep at home, teacher stipends, and trainings (Brown, 2013). Raymond (2015) reported the cost of training teachers usually ranges from \$5,000 to \$7,000 for every 100 teachers trained, plus the compensation of teachers for each home visit they complete. Funds can be raised by nonprofit or community-based organizations or through Title 1 funds (Raymond, 2015).

According to the NEA (2012), in Seattle, teacher contracts include community engagement through a partnership committee focused on closing the achievement gap through teacher home visits. Some schools use Title I funds to pay teacher stipends to make yearly home visits (NEA, 2012). Some schools combine the visits into student contact days, and teachers are paid as if they were teaching a class (Duenas, 2014). In St. Louis, Karen Kalish is putting her foundation's money, about \$50,000 per year, behind the Home Works! Program (Duenas, 2014). It costs \$230,000 to run the program in 10 St. Louis-area schools; Kalish works with schools and the community to raise the rest of the money (Duenas, 2014).

Meyer, Mann, and Becker (2011) found the bulk of allocation funds from the state and federal levels are directed at early care programs (e.g., Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, and Head Start). It continues to be unclear how much of that money will actually reach school-age home visit programs (Meyer et al., 2011). In order for funds to be used in the future, stronger evidence linking home visits and student success is needed (Meyer et al., 2011). The NEA Foundation has provided setup money for teacher home visits in Seattle, WA; Springfield, MA; and Columbus, OH (NEA, 2012).

St. Paul, Minnesota School Districts are required to set aside \$75,000 to pay teachers \$50 for each home visit they make (NEA, 2012). The teacher union fought to get the program put in teacher contracts, which obligated administrators to commit to the program (NEA, 2012). The union wanted teachers to become a leading force in the community by building lasting relationships with families and students (NEA, 2012).

The Washington, DC, home visits program is funded through the Flamboyan Foundation, a private family foundation (Sedelmyer, 2016). Other districts have received

funding from outside organizations, like the Rotary Club in Iowa City, Iowa (Sedelmyer, 2016). In some cases, Title I programming funds from the federal government can cover training for home visits. Districts like Greenville County in South Carolina have received grants from local universities and charitable organizations (Sedelmyer, 2016).

### **Advantages of Teacher Home Visits**

While family engagement has become an important strategy, proponents of teacher home visits feel they give teachers a greater understanding of their students' homes (Meyer, 2013). Raymond (2015) stated, "Home visits tear down barriers, grow relationships and serve the whole child in a way that a meeting in a public school setting can't" (p. 4). Smith (2013) believed to build mutual respect; teachers need to give parents the home court advantage. Teacher home visits can allow teachers to observe the interaction of parents and students within the home; moreover, this helps teachers gain a more realistic picture of students and their home lives (Meyer, 2013).

The first teacher home visit can set the stage for future visits, which allows the teacher to build a strong rapport with the family and student (Duenas, 2014). Jiles (2015) believed, "This crosses over into the classroom and allows the teacher to further support the child in learning" (p. 84). In the nation today, building meaningful parent-teacher relationships and viewing teachers and parents as co-educators who share responsibility are imperative for students' success (NEA, 2012).

Posey-Maddox (2013) noted schools work hard to get parents in the doors, but when that fails, teachers need to be willing to go to families. Kilgore (2014) stated she learned "more about my student and his family through the home visit than I could have over a year of phone calls" (p. 3).



Beatty (2013) found when communities and schools encourage parent involvement in education; a wide range of outcomes can be accomplished. Beatty (2013) also found, “High-quality programs may close between 30 and 70% of achievement gaps, depending on how long children receive the services” (p. 74). The associate superintendent of Mason County School District in Kentucky expressed, “No significant learning occurs without significant relationships” (Patt, 2012, p. 18). Communication is an instrumental part of the relationship between home and school; students are more willing to share their needs or their parents’ needs when the bridge between home and school has been built (NEA, 2012).

A follow-up study was conducted by Meyer et al. (2011) five years after their initial research regarding the implications of teacher home visit programs. Teachers in the follow-up study admitted student and parent attitudes toward school and teachers had the greatest impact (Meyer et al., 2011). In a St. Louis school, tardiness dramatically decreased due to the relationships the school staff built with parents (Henke, 2011). Henke (2011) also found the district had gained more instructional time because parents were “more willing to work with the district and their own child” (p. 40).

Teacher home visits not only assist in building relationships between schools and home, they also help in building the community as a whole (University of Texas at Austin, 2015). Beatty (2013) explained, “Attention to the links among parents, communities, and schools encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education” (p. 73). Working under the belief school and community issues are intricately connected and a reflection of the community (Beatty, 2013), some schools are focusing on offering a broad range of services to families such as affordable housing, health care, safety

classes, and education (University of Texas at Austin, 2015). The United States Department of Education (2014) stated:

The relationship between home and school serves as the foundation for shared learning and responsibility and also acts as an incentive and motivating agent for the continued participation of families and staff and participants are more willing to learn from others whom they respect and trust. (p. 9)

Alberg et al. (2012) discovered teacher home visits offer an insight into how families view “literacy, schooling, and their roles in their children’s education” (p. 56). Smith (2013) found connecting to children and their families can make parents powerful advocates in their child’s education. Although parents may view schooling in a different way than educators, parents are still willing to do what is necessary to ensure their children are successful (Alberg et al., 2012).

Tim Moore, superintendent at Mason County Kentucky School District, emphasized teachers and school staff need to know their students’ interests, where they live, and “any barriers they might have to being able to perform at a higher academic level” (Patt, 2012, p. 18). Moore also asserted educators talk a lot about increasing scores and aligning standards, but “we [educators] need to lead, first, with knowing who our kids are because kids work for people who care for them” (Patt, 2012, p. 18). The NEA (2012) found teacher home visits open lines of communication between schools and parents, which allows for better problem solving should issues arise with students (NEA, 2012). They also specified schools with teacher home programs have noted a decrease in office referrals and an increase in school attendance by students participating in the project (NEA, 2012).

Kronolz (2016) found a teacher home visit program has been a positive experience for a school in Washington, DC. The school was able, through the teacher visit program, to build positive relationships with parents (Kronolz, 2016). The teachers and administrators are working diligently to bridge the gap between home and school, and the relationships built have created a community that benefits students (Kronolz, 2016).

Jung and Sheldon (2015) conducted a study at John Hopkins University Department of Education Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships of student outcomes due to engagement in teacher home visit programs. These outcomes included student attendance, school re-enrollment, and grade-level proficiency in reading (Jung & Sheldon, 2015). Jung and Sheldon (2015) indicated:

Students whose families received home visits were more likely to attend school and to achieve or exceed grade-level reading comprehension than students whose families did not receive a home visit, even after controlling for prior differences in attendance and reading comprehension. (p. 6)

Flannery (2014) agreed teacher home visits are about building relationships and trust between teachers and parents,

### **Disadvantages of Teacher Home Visits**

Opponents of teacher home visit programs believe teachers do enough work in the classroom and expecting them to complete an extra task is too overwhelming (Nix et al., 2012). This is especially true with students whose attitudes and behaviors can reflect the least amount of “effort or care about success in school” (Nix et al., 2012, p. 22).

Teachers are often apprehensive about visiting a student’s home, so they tend to approach

it with hesitation or even fear for their safety (Barnes, 2013; Nix et al., 2012). The safety of the teacher is always a concern for school administrators; as stated by Koblinksy and Maring (2013), “Teachers working in urban schools are more likely to report direct and indirect exposure to assaults, shootings, gang conflict and drug related crimes” (p. 379).

In Washington, DC, during home-visit training, teachers voiced the same concerns heard across the country; what if neglect or abuse is suspected? (Kronolz, 2016). As mandated reporters, abuse and neglect must be reported, but teachers are cautioned to consider some homes may not look like the homes they grew up in (Kronolz, 2016). Due to these concerns, all teacher home visit programs emphasis the importance of teachers visiting homes in pairs (Jiles, 2015; O’Neil, 2014; Zagier, 2013).

Educational leaders are role models to their teachers and school staff. If leaders view teacher home visits as a waste of time, then so shall their staff (Auerback, 2010). School administrators must be willing to “maintain a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 16). A superintendent of a large school district reported family engagement transformed the learning environment within the participating schools (Raymond, 2015). The teacher home visits also added to the professional growth of teachers and increased student achievement (Raymond, 2015).

Building authentic relationships with parents begins with the building leader and his or her ability to see parents as equal partners in education and to fully support teachers who take up the challenge to make home visits (“School Leadership,” 2013). Beatty (2013) found disadvantages such as living in poverty, moving from school to

school, a lack of nutrition, and untreated medical problems significantly impede a child's academic progress.

In Kentucky, teachers were complaining about making scheduled visits to homes just to find no one was home, so the superintendent asked the school board to change the teacher home visit policy (Toncray, 2013). This "good faith effort" policy stated:

Teachers can schedule the visit with parents as required, but if upon arrival at the home, no one is home, the teacher can now leave an informational packet at the house rather than making multiple trips to the house as had been required in the past. (Toncray, 2013, p. 1)

Although the results from the Meyer et al. (2011) follow-up study showed an overall positive impact of teacher home visit programs, a couple of teachers reported concerns related to the "time commitment, individual safety, and personal anxiety about going into homes" (p. 194). Of course the most-mentioned issue was parents' unwillingness to schedule a visit or parents not being at home when teachers arrived for their visits (Meyer et al., 2011).

Teacher perceptions of a family's background, socio-economic status, and race can have a negative impact on their ability to build strong relationships with student families (Sewell, 2012). Sewell (2012) also found lack of teacher preparation and training can increase a teacher's uneasiness to participate in a home visit. Teachers have reported they actually avoid working with families and find the work to be unappealing, while families only felt comfortable working with teachers who treated their children and themselves with respect (Sewell, 2012).

Unfortunately, the majority of teacher home visits are voluntary, and some teachers want to keep a professional relationship with families and only visit with them during parent-teacher conferences or through phone calls or emails (Zagier, 2013). Jiles (2015) indicated while professional development is critical to a successful teacher home visit program; it cannot change the personal attitudes and/or beliefs of the participating teachers. If teachers do not agree with the information obtained in their training, they could change the impact of the program (Jiles, 2015).

The United States Department of Education (2013) found although schools are willing to participate in a teacher home visit program, the lack of knowledge and training of educators makes it the most challenging aspect of the work (United States Department of Education, 2013). Meanwhile, parents can face barriers personally and culturally that can inhibit them from participating in productive partnerships with teachers (United States Department of Education, 2013). The United States Department of Education (2013) noted, “Contributing to this problem is the lack of sustained, accessible, and effective opportunities to build capacity among local education agency (LEA), staff, and families” (p. 7).

When the St. Louis School District launched the teacher home visit program in 2008, their data showed only 18% of families visited were African-American because the families declined teacher home visits due to the fact the visiting teachers were white (Henke, 2011).

Teacher job satisfaction increases, according to the St. Paul Federation of Teachers (2014), because they see a difference in the connections they have with their students and how that impacts their classrooms. Teachers in the same study shared it was

their favorite time of year, visiting their students families and building those relationships (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014). Nix et al. (2012) found the biggest challenge teachers faced prior to making home visits was the “fear of the unknown” (p. 35). They were fearful of being put in an unsafe situation, scary neighborhoods, and being out of their comfort zones (Nix et al., 2012). Teachers were also concerned they would intimidate parents by visiting homes (Nix et al., 2012). If parents are uncomfortable meeting at their home, they can choose a location outside of home and school such as coffee shops, libraries, or parks (Smith, 2013).

### **Training and Tips for a Successful Home Visit Program**

Teacher home-visit training is crucial for visits to be effective (Henke, 2011). The United States Department of Education (2013) reported, “Certain process conditions must be met for adult participants to come away from a learning experience not only with new knowledge but with the ability and desire to apply what they have learned” (p. 9). These conditions include initiatives linked to learning and families who are connected to “teaching and learning goals for the student” (United States Department of Education, 2013, p. 9).

Jiles (2015) indicated the need is urgent for teachers who want to learn and improve their delivery of services to diverse families across a variety of settings through home visits. Teachers have to understand the needs and realities diverse students face (NEA, 2012). Sewell (2012) reported teachers must be willing to work with families whose social background, ethnicity, and culture are different from their own.

According to Patton (2015), school staff should make parents aware of home visits when they enroll their students in school. Staff should also mail a letter home to

parents explaining the purpose of the visit and what to expect during the visit (Patton, 2015). Teachers should always go in teams, either with a co-worker or administrator (Jiles, 2015; NEA, 2012; Zagier, 2013).

Administrators should always know when their teachers are making home visits and at which home they are visiting (Duenas, 2014; Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Teachers should bring something for the family such as a baggie of school supplies, a school calendar magnet, a book, etc. (Smith, 2013). Although a beginning-of-the-school-year visit is the best practice, families are busy at that time of the year, so trying to get a visit in before the end of first quarter is appropriate (Smith, 2013). Home visits should occur after school on the weekdays and should last anywhere between a half hour (Patton, 2015) to about an hour (Nix et al., 2012; O'Neil, 2014).

Educators should be good listeners, as parents want to share their dreams, fears, and hopes for their child (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014; Zagier, 2013). Conversations with parents during the home visit should be casual and should focus on the student and the family and not academics (Smith, 2013). In order for parents to feel comfortable with their guest, teachers should share personal information about themselves and their families (Nix et al., 2012). Teachers must be willing to visit parents outside of homes; parents may be too embarrassed for school staff to be in their homes, so teachers should be willing to meet families at locations that make them comfortable (Smith, 2013).

Smith (2013) offered tips for teachers conducting home visits. She recommended taking "copious notes" right after each visit and each time a teacher is in contact with parents (e.g., phone conversations, emails) (p. 77). These notes can help teachers



remember each family and their particular situation, needs, and dreams for their children (Smith, 2013). These notes can be helpful when working with students and to review before conferences (Michigan Department of Education, 2015; NEA, 2012). A few of the teacher home visit programs offer the home visiting teachers debriefing sessions each week to discuss with peers what they learned on their visits and how that would impact their classroom structure and lessons (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014).

Jiles (2015) revealed, although teachers may be willing to conduct home visits, professional development to train teachers prior to home visits is necessary, and must be critically analyzed to ensure its effectiveness. The United States Department of Education (2013) stated initiatives must include a well-organized and established plan to develop adult capacity, such as in-service and professional development for teachers as well as workshops or workplace trainings for families. The United States Department of Education (2013) also found, “When effectively implemented, such opportunities build and enhance the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of stakeholders to engage in effective partnerships that support student achievement and development and school improvement” (p. 9). The Parent Teacher Home Visits Program (2016) determined, “Training is a major concern when preparing qualified teachers to provide services in a variety of social and economic settings” (p. 85). Professional development programs for these teachers must “be done in context, and be multidimensional and multimodal in nature to reduce the gap between research and practice for the benefit of children and their significant others” (Parent Teacher Home Visits, 2016, p. 86).

### **In Their Own Words**

Researchers continue to confirm the impact of teacher home visit programs on student achievement, discipline referrals, and attendance (Flannery, 2014; Raymond, 2015; St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014). Perhaps the most impacted by these programs are the stakeholders involved: teachers, parents, and students. A third-grade teacher in Minnesota stated she “loved doing home visits; it’s been a very enriching experience for me” (Dunbar, 2013, p. 2). A mother new to the program stated, “It wasn’t what I thought it was going to be, I thought it was going to be structured...it was more like a friendly conversation” (Dunbar, 2013, p. 2).

A reading teacher in Illinois explained, “I should not aim to connect a family to the child’s education; rather, I should aim to connect education to the student and her family” (Alberg et al., 2012, p. 59). A foster mother in Michigan explained that with all the children she had fostered over the years, “I’ve never before had a teacher come to my home; when the teacher called me, I was like, okay, this is different, this is nice” (Flannery, 2014, p. 3). A parent in Massachusetts could not believe “a teacher asked me, ‘How can I be a better teacher?’” (Castelluccio, 2015, p. 2).

One teacher in Minnesota ate dinner with the family of one of her students, and when she told the mother, “Thank you for the meal,” the mother stated, “This is nothing compared to what you do” (Kilgore, 2014, p. 2). Parents typically want their children to be successful (Kronolz, 2016). In Washington, DC, one mother explained, “I want so much for my son; I want him trying to succeed, maybe not succeeding, but just trying” (Kronolz, 2016, p. 1). A teacher in the same program shared, “I had expectations of what

the parents were supposed to do; I never heard what they wanted me to do” (as cited in Kronolz, 2016, p. 2).

The St. Paul Federation of Teachers (2014) shared words and phrases their teachers used during debriefing sessions to describe the teacher home visit program: “fun, favorite part of the year, positive, respect/respectful, eye-opening, necessary, and meaningful” (p. 12). A teacher participating in a teacher home visit program in Texas shared, “I learned more in two hours than I could have the whole year” (as cited in Nix et al., 2012, p. 31). One teacher in the Missouri teacher home visit program researched for this study stated, “It gives me the opportunity to get familiar with the child in a way that I wouldn’t be able to at a parent-teacher conference because the parents are more relaxed at home and more willing to share information about their child” (as cited in O’Neil, 2014, p. 2). A parent in the same program felt more comfortable going to her child’s school after the teacher had visited them at home (Zagier, 2013). The same program reported, “For some students, school and home are two different worlds; when you create that bridge, it becomes cohesive” (Zagier, 2013, p. 3).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the history of teacher home visits was reviewed; teacher home visit programs have been around for over 100 years and continue to be a resource that enables schools to build strong relationships with families (Manz, 2012). The advantages of teacher home visits for teachers as well as for students and families were indicated. The disadvantages of teacher home visits were also reviewed, and evidence was found that teachers have an enormous amount of work on their plates; therefore, expecting them

to visit students' homes outside of the school day is just another task they may not be able to handle (Barnes, 2013).

This chapter also included a review of the costs associated with training teachers and compensating them for each home visit as well as follow-up visits to students' homes. The research revealed the many ways districts are funding teacher home visit programs. Training tips for a successful teacher home visit were explored and reported in this chapter. The voices of teachers, parents, and students of teacher home visits across the country were also explored.

In Chapter Three, mixed-methodology research using qualitative and quantitative data is defined. How the collected data were analyzed and what types of coding were used to complete this task is discussed. The research design for this study is reviewed, as well as the research questions. The population and sampling size of the study are outlined. Finally, the data collection and analysis procedures are described.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The missing link between students and their academic success may well be parent involvement; however, schools must be willing to allow parents to become involved. Sewell (2012) found, “Challenges arise when a teacher has not been prepared to partner effectively with families and to best serve children within the context of the family” (p. 259). Over the last two decades, researchers have shown student achievement is possible when parents support students’ learning in the home (NEA, 2012). One program that reaches parents and students is the teacher home visit program (Fehrer, 2014; Jung & Sheldon, 2015). Teacher home visit programs were designed to create a bridge between home and school which allows parents and teachers to be co-educators in the child’s learning success (Jiles, 2015).

The purpose of this mixed-method case study was to examine a teacher home visit program. It is anticipated this case study will persuade more school districts to consider teacher home visit programs. Teacher perceptions of families have a great deal of influence on the relationship between teachers and parents (Sewell, 2012). Changing perceptions through teacher home visits could very well change the outcome of a student’s future (Barnes, 2013).

Mixed-method research, in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected and studied (Zohrabi, 2013), was determined as the method for this study. This method is applicable to this case study because the perceptions of the principal, teachers, and parents were gathered through an interview, focus groups and surveys. While teacher home visit programs exist, Sawchuk (2011) believed continued tracking of the results

will help “determine their impact on student behavior and academics,” and school districts can see tremendous value in teacher home visits, but more, “qualitative data matched with quantitative data gives us the truth” (p. 10). It is critical to identify and employ effective and affordable ways to provide children ample opportunities to succeed (Grannis, Sawhill, & Winship, 2012). The end goal of teacher home visits is stronger relationships with families and better learning for students (Hill, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers in one urban school regarding the teacher home visit program?
2. What are the perceptions of the principal in one urban school regarding the teacher home visit program?
3. What are the parents’ overall experiences of the teacher home visit program in one urban school?

### **Research Design**

Teachers have the responsibility to build positive communication between school and home (Barnes, 2013). Fehrer (2014) reported, “Family engagement has emerged as an important strategy for improving student outcomes” (p. 1). Often, school administrators and teachers forget parents are their child’s first teachers (Hill, 2013). The goal of a teacher home visit program is to build stronger relationships between home and school as well as to increase learning for students (Hill, 2013). While not a new idea, teacher home visits are encouraging teachers to leave classrooms to meet students and families on their own turf (Duenas, 2014). A mixed-method research design was

appropriate for this study because it is a variant of the “embedded design in which the researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data within a case study” (Clark & Creswell, 2011, p. 95).

A mixed-method research design allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the studied subject (Zohrabi, 2013). This type of research is becoming more popular as it allows for “qualitative and quantitative data to be simultaneously collected, analyzed and interpreted” (Zohrabi, 2013, p. 254). Richards (2015) described qualitative data as a method of studying people and how they view their world, observing them to understand their situations and explaining their behavior. Jackson and St. Pierre (2014) defined qualitative data as the collection of words obtained by “interviewing and observing people” (p. 1). Silverman (2013) eloquently described qualitative research as “verbal descriptions of real life situations” (p. 4).

In this study, qualitative data are defined as “open ended questions that begin with words such as *what* and *how* to suggest an exploration of the central phenomenon” (Clark & Creswell, 2011, p. 415). The qualitative data in this study were gathered through two focus groups comprised of first-year teachers and veteran teachers who were participating in a teacher home visit program, as well as an interview with the principal of that particular school. Quantitative methodology is defined as research that focuses on numerical data collected through surveys, polls, or questionnaires; this method emphasizes objective measurements (Babbie, 2013; Creswell, 2013). In this study, quantitative data were gathered through a survey created by the University of Missouri-St. Louis Educational, Psychology, and Research Department (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014). The parent and student survey was forwarded to school principals via

electronic mail. The principal sent the electronic link of the survey home with all parents of students in grades three to 12, along with a paper copy of the survey.

When the IRB was approved (see Appendix A), a copy was forwarded to the Educational, Psychology, and Research Department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The university expunged all personal identifiable information from the parent and student survey results and forwarded them to the researcher (see Appendix B). Once the interview data were received, an open and axial coding method was used to identify strands. The survey data are presented as descriptive statistics.

### **Ethical Considerations**

After the IRB approval was received, the data collection process began. All potential participants of the research study were given a copy of the informed consent and permission form (see Appendix C) as well as the recruitment letter (see Appendix D). It described in detail the purpose of the research, any possible risks, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study without negative effects. Upon agreement to participate in the research, signed copies of the permission forms were collected by the participating teacher home visit coordinator and given to the primary researcher. The primary researcher locked the consent forms in a drawer and was the only person with access to the locked drawer.

After the researcher conducted the focus groups (see Appendix E) and principal interview (see Appendix F), the recordings from those interviews were locked in a drawer with the primary researcher the only person with access to it. When the data were transcribed electronically, they were protected by a password known only by the primary researcher. The transcriptions were coded using axial coding and a word which was



locked in a drawer once completed. When the results of the axial coding and word web were electronically inserted into the research paper, the documents were password protected by the primary researcher.

No human subjects participating in the research were at risk during the process. All documents and files will be destroyed three years from the completion of the research project. To assure anonymity for the participants of the focus groups, principal interview, and parent and student surveys, no identifiable names, ages, sexes, races, or locations were divulged.

### **Population and Sample**

Due to the proximity of the research base, the populations for this study were narrowed down to one Midwest state and the elementary schools participating in a teacher home visit program. The list of teacher home visit programs in Missouri was reviewed using the following criteria: 1) five to 10 first-year teachers participating in the teacher home visit program, 2) five to 10 veteran teachers participating in the teacher home visit program, 3) a building principal willing to be interviewed as part of this research, and 4) parent surveys to determine satisfaction in the teacher home visit program. These criteria had to be met before a school could be considered in the sample.

Participants for this study were identified using purposeful sampling, when “researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced... the key concept being explored in the study” (Clark & Creswell, 2011, p. 415). This type of sampling was chosen in order to obtain different viewpoints and perceptions from teachers who were first-year teachers in the teacher home visit program and veteran teachers of the

teacher home visit program. In selecting participating schools, the numerous K-12 public school districts across the United States were researched.

Only one teacher home visit program was found to meet all the criteria in northwest Missouri. The founder of that program was contacted and asked if teachers in the program would be willing to be a part of this research. The founder agreed and electronically mailed a list of schools participating in the teacher home visit program. This list also contained the names and contact information of the teacher home visit program coordinators. The building principals and their contact information were provided as well; however, this list did not include demographics about the schools or their populations.

### **Instrumentation**

Mixed-method researchers use qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus groups as well as quantitative data obtained from surveys (Clark & Creswell, 2011). The qualitative data were elicited through interview questions (see Appendix C) that were open-ended and designed to occasion responses to answer the research questions. The interview questions were field-tested by educators not participating in the study.

The feedback received from the field tests were noted, and interview questions were reworded or changed as needed. The interview protocol included the date, time, and location of the interviews; the names of all persons interviewed; their positions at the school; and space for the interviewer to make notes. The interviewer notes were later added to the focus group and principal interview transcriptions as part of the study.

## **Methodological Triangulation**

Irby and Lunenburg (2008) defined triangulation:

...[as] another method for ensuring that the study is robust, valid, and reliable.

Triangulation may appear as four basic types: (a) data triangulation, involving time, space, and persons, (b) investigator triangulation, which consists of the use of multiple, rather than single researcher/observers, (c) theory triangulation, which consists of using more than one theoretical frame in the interpretation of the phenomenon, and (d) methodological triangulation, which involves using multiple methods. Multiple triangulations may be used when you combine in one dissertation, multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies. (p. 104)

The type of triangulation used in this study was methodological since data were collected through parent and student surveys, a principal interview, and two focus groups.

Research was also conducted on the current literature regarding teacher home visit programs across the country.

The parent survey was created by the University of Missouri-St. Louis Educational, Psychology, and Research Department in conjunction with the Home Works! Program in St. Louis, Missouri. The survey was conducted to gauge the success of the program through the eyes of the participating parents and students (Duenas, 2014). The link to the survey was forwarded to the participating building principal, who disseminated surveys to the parents of students in grades three through 12 via electronic mail. Hard copies of the survey were mailed to parents who had no access to internet

service. The survey results served as the secondary data and quantitative portion of the study.

The Research Department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis received the completed surveys through an electronic survey database program. They also received the hard copies of completed surveys. The Research Department aggregated the data and created a report from those findings. That report was forwarded to the researcher to be used as the quantitative secondary source of the mixed-method research.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Once a list of schools was identified, contact with the teacher home visit coordinator at each school was established via electronic mail. The teacher home visit coordinators helped the researcher determine which schools had the necessary number of first-year and veteran teachers who were currently participating in the teacher home visit program and who would be willing to participate in a focus group for this study. The building principal also had to be willing to be interviewed as part of the study.

Following IRB approval from Lindenwood University, a copy of the approval letter was forwarded to the teacher home visit coordinator at Elementary School A. The teacher home visit coordinator then contacted the focus group teachers with a copy of the approval letter (see Appendix D) as well as the recruitment letter (see Appendix E). At the request of the building principal, copies of the IRB approval letter and recruitment letter were forwarded to the principal via electronic mail so the interview appointment could be scheduled.

A date and time was scheduled with the teacher home visit coordinator and building principal for each focus group interview session and building principal

interview. A 30-minute time limit was allowed for each focus group and principal interview. Copies of the focus group questions as well as the principal interview questions were forwarded, via electronic mail, along with consent forms for each participant.

The building principal interview and the teacher focus groups occurred at the participating school on the scheduled date. The interview and focus group answers were recorded using an audio recording device. Each participant was identified through a letter/number system to assure confidentiality. For example, in the first-year teacher focus group, each participant was identified as participant F1-F7, and the veteran teacher focus group participants were identified as participants V1-V7.

The principal was identified during the interview as P1. To avoid confusion with the audio recording, the researcher gave each participant an index card with a letter/number. As the interview progressed, the participants stated their letter/number prior to answering the focus group questions.

The IRB approval letter was forwarded via electronic mail to an associate professor at the Department of Educational, Psychology, Research, and Evaluation at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Once received, the associate professor forwarded the parent survey report to the researcher. The report was studied to find common themes also established in the qualitative data.

### **Data Analysis**

After the focus groups and interview were completed, the audio recordings, as well as the field notes, were transcribed. Those transcriptions were not shared with any

outside sources. The transcriptions were open coded, which is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis (Saldaña, 2015).

The transcriptions from the two focus groups and principal interview were open coded separately. Once the initial open coding was complete, they were combined. Upon completion, axial coding was used to identify relationships and themes among the open codes (Gallicano, 2013).

When the survey results were collected by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the data were reviewed and coded. These data were analyzed, and the responses were merged with the qualitative data. They were then set up in a side-by-side comparison using a table so the coded data could be reviewed to show evidence for each topic (Clark & Creswell, 2011).

When using different procedures for collecting data and when obtaining information through different sources, the researcher can augment the validity and reliability of the data and of the interpretation of the data (Zohrabi, 2013). This also allows qualitative and quantitative data to be combined to triangulate findings “in order that they may be mutually corroborated” (Clark & Creswell, 2011, p. 62). Methodological triangulation was used to validate the findings.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the purpose of the proposed study as examining a teacher home visit program. The interview questions were created to define the perspectives of the participating teachers, a principal, parents, and students about the advantages and disadvantages of the program. The research questions were clearly articulated, and the research design was identified as case study research.

The sample for this study was narrowed down to one Midwest elementary school. The school chosen to participate in the study was narrowed down from a list of Midwest school districts participating in a teacher home visit program. Six veteran teachers of the teacher home visit program, six first-year teachers to the teacher home visit program, and the building principal were interviewed.

The list was reviewed using strict criteria. All criteria had to be met before the school could be considered in the sample. The participants of the focus groups were chosen using purposeful sampling, wherein "...researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced... the key concept being explored in the study" (Clark & Creswell, 2011, p. 415).

The instrumentation used for this study included interview questions field-tested by educators not participating in this study. The questions were used to interview two focus groups of teachers and one building principal. The second instrumentation used for this study were parent and student surveys.

The surveys were created and distributed by the University of Missouri-St. Louis and are considered secondary data for this study. The data collection process was described including focus groups, a principal interview, and parent and student surveys. The analysis of collected data was discussed for case study research including transcriptions, coding, and descriptors.

In Chapter Four, the data collected through focus groups, an interview, and surveys are presented. The focus groups and interview data were analyzed, and four themes emerged from the data. The themes included building relationships, diversity and safety, parent involvement, and impact on the students' futures.

The secondary data collected through parent and student surveys by the University of Missouri-St. Louis were reviewed. Once reviewed, the secondary data were set up in tables and graphs for better understanding of the findings. These tables and graphs were reviewed for relevance to this study.



## Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine if teacher home visits impacted students' school attendance, grades, and discipline. This research was completed through a mixed-methodology study. The purpose of this form of research is "that both qualitative and quantitative research, in combination, provides a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone" (Bulsara, 2015, p. 6).

The qualitative data were collected through an interview with one urban school principal, a focus group of six veteran teachers participating in the teacher home visit program, and a second focus group with six first-year teachers participating in the teacher home visit program. Consent forms were read and signed by each participant, and the interview questions were provided in advance to all participants.

The population of the school chosen to participate in this research was approximately 830 students and 55 full-time teachers. Participating in the teacher home visit program were 103 students from grades three to five. Sixty-two of the students received a teacher home visit during either 2015 or 2016. Twenty-nine of the students received visits both years.

The focus groups were interviewed, and their responses were recorded on a digital recorder. After the focus groups were completed, the recordings were transcribed. Open coding included labeling words and phrases found in the transcripts multiple times by making notes, underlining significant words, and circling full thoughts (Lawrence & Tar, 2013).

Once the open coding was complete, the data were sorted using axial coding to determine themes. The initial themes that emerged included positive perception, making

a connection, bonding with families, forming relationships, safety concerns, communication, collaboration, kids try harder, and parent involvement. The axial coding narrowed these themes, and the researcher used a thought web. Consequently, further coding yielded five themes; however, upon added examination, those five themes were merged into four themes.

### **Theme One: Building Relationships**

Building relationships was the most common theme throughout both focus groups and the interview with the principal. The principal stated the purpose of initiating the teacher home visit program was to “build relationships” and “form a bond between teacher and parents.” The principal also believed teacher home visits could and would continue to “build a trust system” that improved the overall sense of community in the school as well as the morale of the building staff and families served every day.

Visiting students in the home allows teachers and parents to talk about the parents’ dreams for their children’s future and concerns they may have about their education. These visits allow the teacher and parent to become a team and work together to do what is right by the student. One focus group teacher believed building the relationship with parents gave the teachers insight into what was happening in the home and allowed educators to understand what the student needs from the school.

A first-year teacher discussed with the focus group how the teacher home visits allowed her and her students’ parents to become “a team” where it is no longer “[what] I want as a teacher, or what they want as a parent, but what we want for the student to be successful.” The teacher continued by clarifying home visits “allow us to set goals for the student and work together, communicate, and collaborate to make it happen.” Several

of the teachers shared they believe building a relationship with parents allows them to discuss “things you couldn’t discuss with them if you didn’t have those bonds.”

One teacher talked about visiting families before school starts, which allowed her to form a relationship with each family and better understand the infrastructure of the home. She was able to gain “personal information” about the family she would not have known if she had not visited. A first-year teacher to the teacher home visit program noted when she was a stay-at-home mom and was approached to participate as a parent in the teacher home visit program, she refused because she felt the school was trying to “stick their nose in her business” and that her home was “none of their concern.”

One first-year teacher explained she experienced a lack of communication sometimes where “parents think one thing is happening and the child doesn’t relay” that information well or consistently between home and school. Teacher home visits allow for a direct line of communication between teacher and parent; a bond is formed which helps to “definitely clear up a lot of misunderstandings sometimes.” A veteran teacher stated when something is “going on at home that impacts the child’s ability at school,” having information allows “me to get the most support possible for them in the school setting.”

Teacher home visits not only help build relationships with families but also help build relationships with students. Students know “teachers care about them because they come to their homes.” Teachers want to “see their rooms,” where they live, who they live with, and their relationship with their families. The visits allow teachers to have a “broader base of knowledge about your student and gives you a more personal

connection in the classroom.” These visits can improve students’ self-esteem as well as “academics because they may want to try harder.”

One focus group member reported a home visit “helps the parents and the students both trust teachers in general to where a lot of times the parents and the students don’t trust the school or the teachers as much.” This trust can be beneficial to improving overall relationships between families and schools, because teachers are now viewed like anybody else and parents are more willing to sit down and have conversations with school staff. A veteran teacher shared, “Building relationships with families and students can impact a student’s future in school.” She continued, “Students may look back on that later and say, that teacher is someone that believed in me and believed in me enough to come to visit me at my home and talk with my parents.” The same veteran teacher expressed, “Maybe they will come back later on or fall back on that and it will help them some in their future.” Another veteran teacher hoped the visit “[would] impact their future somehow because one person took the time out of their day to show them that they were interested in what they were doing outside of school.”

The building principal was asked to rate four different areas of concern for most schools: attendance, achievement, behavior, and overall school and home communication. The rating scale ranged from 1-5 (1=no improvement, 2=some improvement, 3=good improvement, 4=great improvement, and 5=the greatest improvement). He rated overall school and home communication as a four and talked about how there are many things in play that help a school succeed, but the teacher home visit program really helps “increase student homework completion which is a large part of the school’s success.”

## **Theme Two: Diversity and Safety**

Although the school randomly picked to participate in the focus group and principal interview was in an urban district, the site of the building was actually in a rural area on the outskirts of the district. The diversity within this particular school was based upon poverty instead of race. When asked how they handle cultural differences between themselves and the students' homes, the focus group teachers collectively viewed the question in a broader sense and more along the lines of socioeconomic status. One teacher noted it was difficult to see people living with less than her own family, and she tried to "imagine my children in that." The same teacher noted it helped her better understand her students' needs in relationships to what her "own kids have and take advantage of."

The majority of the teachers agreed handling visits with "unconditional positive regard" and "treating everybody the same no matter what" helps ease the families' apprehension about having teachers in their homes. A veteran teacher explained how this put things in perspective for her:

We see things here at school but we don't see it firsthand until we get into their homes and see exactly what things are like when they get home at the end of the day because it is certainly not what my kids go home to.

One first-year teacher responded by saying she is not going to the home to look at the living conditions. Rather, she stated, "I'm actually wanting to visit with them," showing up at the home and being comfortable, regardless of whether their "cleanliness standards are like that of mine." She mentioned showing up and being comfortable in homes no matter what they look like or where they are.

All of the focus group teachers were, at times, a bit nervous to make home visits due to fear for their own safety. The veteran teachers were less apprehensive about the visits, but a few still harbored anxieties. One veteran teacher, who had been doing home visits since the program's induction, explained she did not have any concerns about her safety but thought she was less apprehensive because she had a black belt in karate.

Another veteran teacher, while visiting a home, had a parent put a gun on the table but the teacher did not feel "it was done in a threatening matter; it was that the family didn't think anything about it." However, the same veteran teacher noted in a previous visit the parent opened the door holding an axe, and the teacher left. The family eventually met with the teacher at school, and the teacher treated the meeting at the school as if she were in the family's home. One veteran teacher explained that although she did not have concerns, she "could understand where concerns would come into play, especially with parents that are hostile toward you anyway."

A first-year teacher to the program had concerns after being trained and having to discuss what to do if safety concerns arose during the visit. She noted, "Because, when I was asked to go on visits, I was never the lead teacher, so most of the homes I visited were familiar students and the visit didn't feel like there would be any safety concerns." Another first-year teacher always had concerns, "because you are going at night and as the year goes on, it's dark. You never know what situation you are going to walk into in the home, even though they know you are coming." She also stated even though families know the teacher is coming, "you don't know what's been going on that day, who is going to be there that is not the parent of the student... and you just don't know what it's going to be like when you arrive." One first-year teacher stated when she arrived at the

home of a student; there were police cars everywhere, so she left. The researcher asked, “So did you ever revisit that home?” The teacher stated, “I did not, because the family moved away shortly afterwards.”

Although there was some hesitation on the part of a couple of veterans and all of the first-year teachers, they pushed through those fears and conducted the majority of the home visits. As one teacher stated, “I just hope for the best. Even though it can, at times, be uncomfortable, I still want to visit the home.” The building principal, when asked if he had received pushback from teachers regarding home visits and fears of visiting student homes, stated:

No, we live in a somewhat rural area with a majority of children living in poverty, so our teachers have no qualms with going out and visiting families to make that connection and help families with other resources as needed.

While safety concerns were expressed by both focus groups, the opportunity to build an ongoing relationship with a student’s family for the sole purpose of increasing the student’s educational success far outweighed concerns.

### **Theme Three: Parent Involvement**

The teachers shared part of the teacher home visit program is inviting parents to dinner hosted by the school after their first home visit. This invitation is a way to “get parents together,” and the teachers get to “mingle with the parents more.” In interviewing the veteran teachers of the teacher home visit program, one noted although she has not seen an increase in parent involvement at the school building, she has noticed “parental help with homework.”

The teachers continued by discussing how parents are much more supportive of homework and procedures in the classroom and will work with their kids at home. One teacher related, “If parents do not understand the homework or are upset about a student’s grade, they [parents] are more likely to be friendly when they contact me and less likely to yell, because we have built a relationship through the home visit.”

#### **Theme Four: Impact on a Student’s Future**

Both the focus groups and the building administrator were asked whether they believed the teacher home visit program would impact the future of students. The principal expressed the students are building relationships with adults in the school and talking with the teachers and their parents about their education. He also felt the teacher home visit shows students teachers care about their education and want them to be successful, because teachers take time out of their day to visit the students’ homes. The principal also stated, “It is really good for kids’ self-esteem, and I think it opens the eyes of students and how they see their teachers.”

The majority of both focus groups agreed the teacher home visit program impacts students now and in the future. One veteran teacher explained, “It makes students feel more comfortable with teachers and authority figures and ultimately helps them advocate for their own needs.” Another veteran teacher felt the program allows teachers to build rapport with parents, which impacts the way a student sees parents and teachers working together as a team for their benefit. The program allows parents and students to trust the teacher and other adults in the school building, which can be beneficial as a student grows and changes teachers throughout the school career.



A first-year teacher to the program explained in some cases, home visits can impact a student's future. A student may look back later on and think, "That teacher really cared about me and believed in me enough to visit my home and build a relationship with my parents, so I would have a better chance of being successful in school." Perhaps the visits will impact student futures somehow, "because one person took the time out of their day to show them [the student] that they [the teacher] were interested in what they [the students] were doing outside of school."

Another first-year teacher hoped the program had allowed her to plant a little seed in a student's head that school is a safe and positive place. Regardless of what parents say about the teacher or the school district, the students know there are people in that building who want them to be successful. As much as teachers and staff want the teacher home visit program to impact students, some teachers noted the impact is reliant upon the parents' perspective not only of the program but the school as well. Teachers can only do so much when parents are uninterested in their students' school success.

The quantitative data are secondary data collected by the University of Missouri-St. Louis Education, Psychology, and Research Department. These data were collected using a parent survey which was forwarded to the school principals of 17 schools. It must be mentioned the researcher of this current study was unaware students participating in the teacher home visit program would also be encouraged to participate in the survey.

The parent surveys were forwarded to the school principals via electronic mail by the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The principals sent the electronic link home to parents participating in the teacher home visit program and parents not participating in the program. Once the IRB was approved to conduct this study, a copy of the approval

was forwarded to the research department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. When the IRB was received and the personally identifiable information was expunged from the collected surveys, the results were mailed to the researcher.

Once the parent survey data were received, the results were reviewed and coded in order to answer the research questions. The “survey was completed by 956 parents at 17 schools across an urban district. Of the total respondents, 597 parents participated in the Home Works! Program” (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014, p. 2). One glaring observation by the research team was the disproportionate participation of families with higher-income, higher-educated parents, and of two-parent families participating in the program (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014). The University of Missouri St. Louis (2014) research team determined the participation of those families was possibly due to time availability and as a result of low-income, single-parent households not having the resources to set aside time to participate in a teacher home visit. From these disproportionate findings, the research team determined the Home Works! Program would need to conduct further studies to find better ways of involving all parents in the program (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014).

The parents who completed the survey consisted of 64 males participating in the Home Works! Program and 49 males not participating in the program. The number of females completing the survey included participants and non-participants in the Home Works! Program at 509 and 232, respectively. The number of participants who noted English as their primary language was 508 for parents participating in the Home Works! Program and 261 for parents not participating.

The majority of parents participating in the Home Works! Programs were white and 30-39 years of age. Table 1 shows the percentage of each ethnic group, and Table 2 displays the age ranges of participating parents.

Table 1

*Ethnicity of Parents Participating in the Home Works! Program*

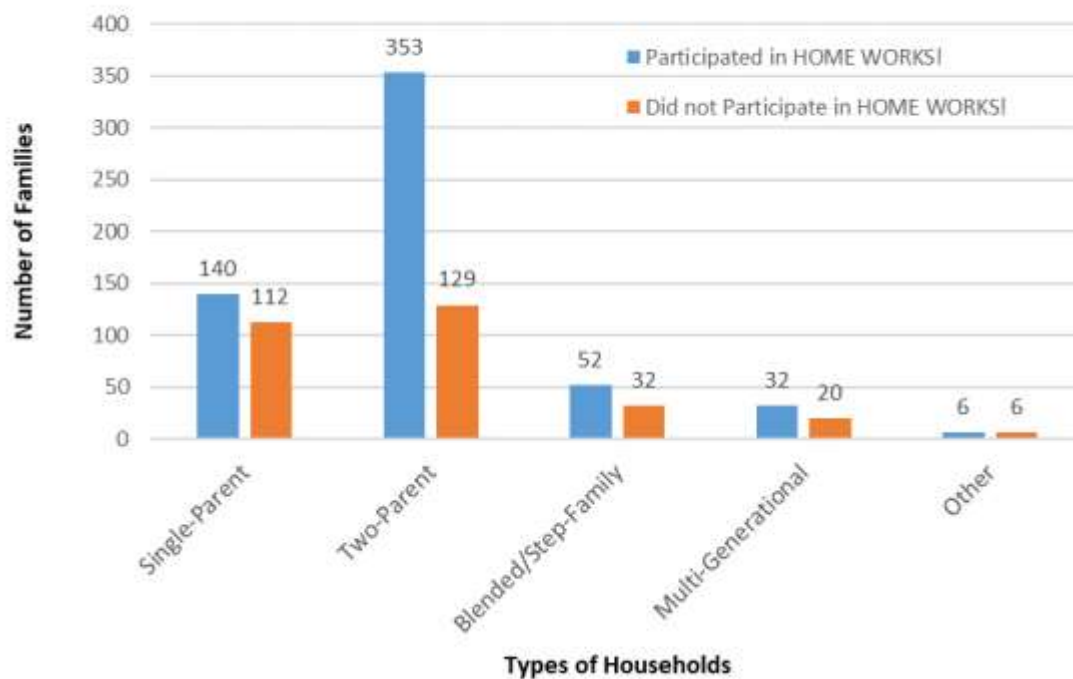
| Ethnicity        | Participants in Home Works! |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Asian            | 16                          |
| African American | 217                         |
| Hispanic         | 20                          |
| Multi-Racial     | 9                           |
| Native American  | 4                           |
| White            | 291                         |
| Other            | 21                          |

Table 2

*Age Range of Parents Participating in the Home Works! Program*

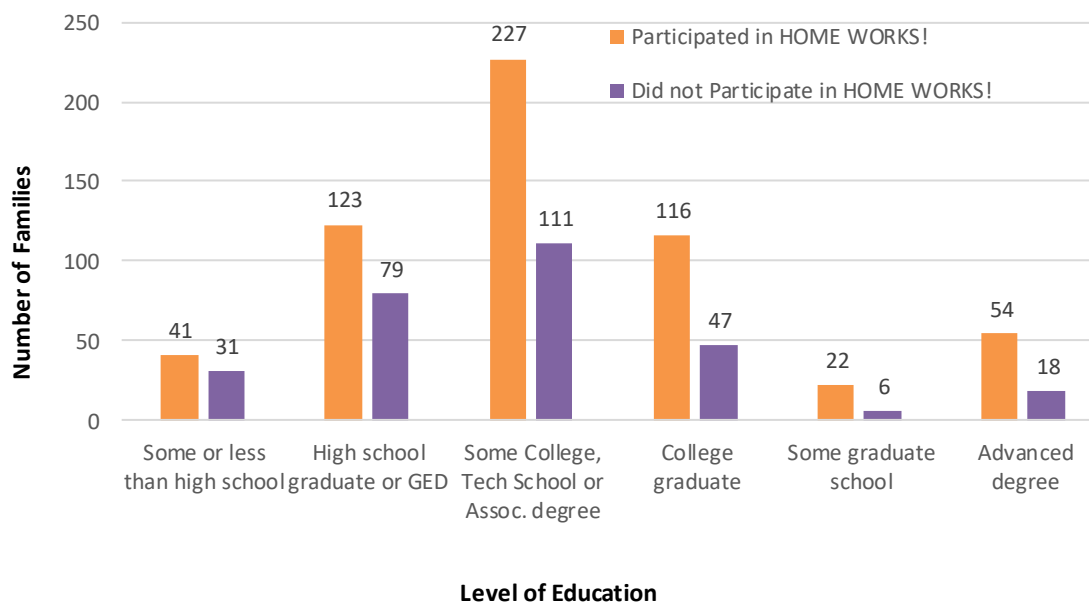
| Age Range  | Parents Participating in Home Works! | Parents Not Participating in Home Works! |
|------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Under 30   | 106                                  | 61                                       |
| 30-39      | 333                                  | 159                                      |
| 40-49      | 107                                  | 54                                       |
| 50-59      | 20                                   | 11                                       |
| 60 or over | 7                                    | 8  |

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the family units participating and not participating in the Home Works! Program. The majority of families participating in the Home Works! Program was part of a two-parent household.



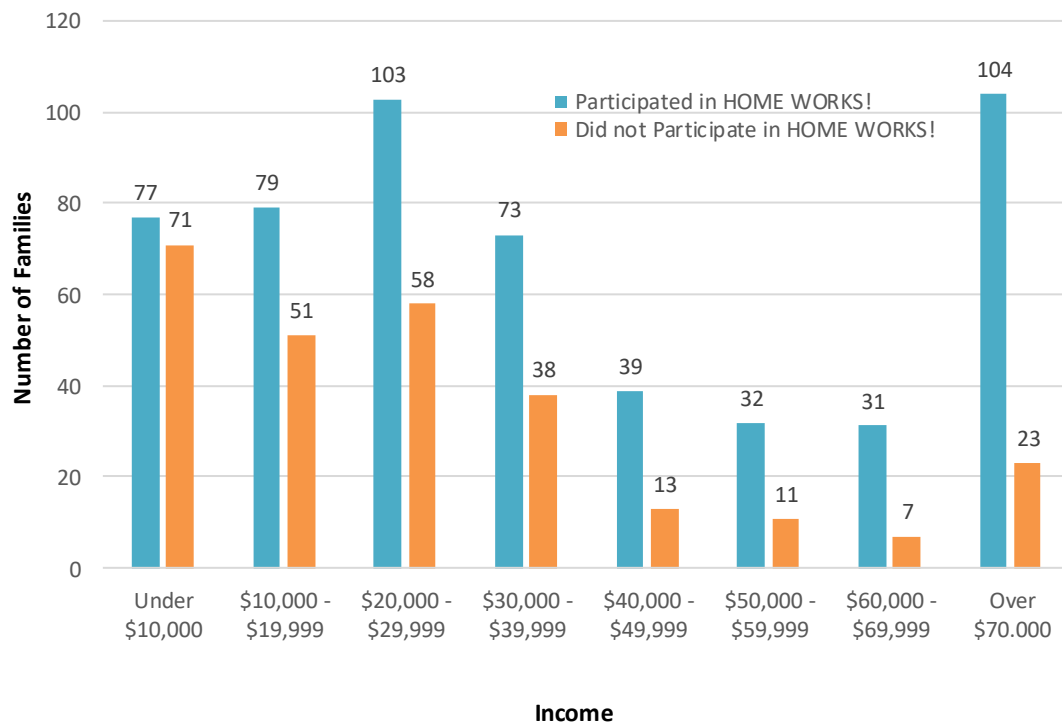
*Figure 1.* What best describes your household?

The families participating in the Home Works! Program were predominantly from a household where the parent had some college, technical school, or an associate's degree; whereas, only 41 participants had some or less than high school.



*Figure 2.* Education of parents participating in the teacher home visit program.

Figure 3 shows the majority of participants in the Home Works! Program reported a household income of over \$70,000 per year. The next most-selected income range was \$20,000-\$29,000 per year.



*Figure 3.* Household income of families participating in the teacher home visit program.

Figure 4 shows parent responses regarding how valuable they considered the first teacher home visit to be for themselves and their student. The majority of parents felt it was very valuable.

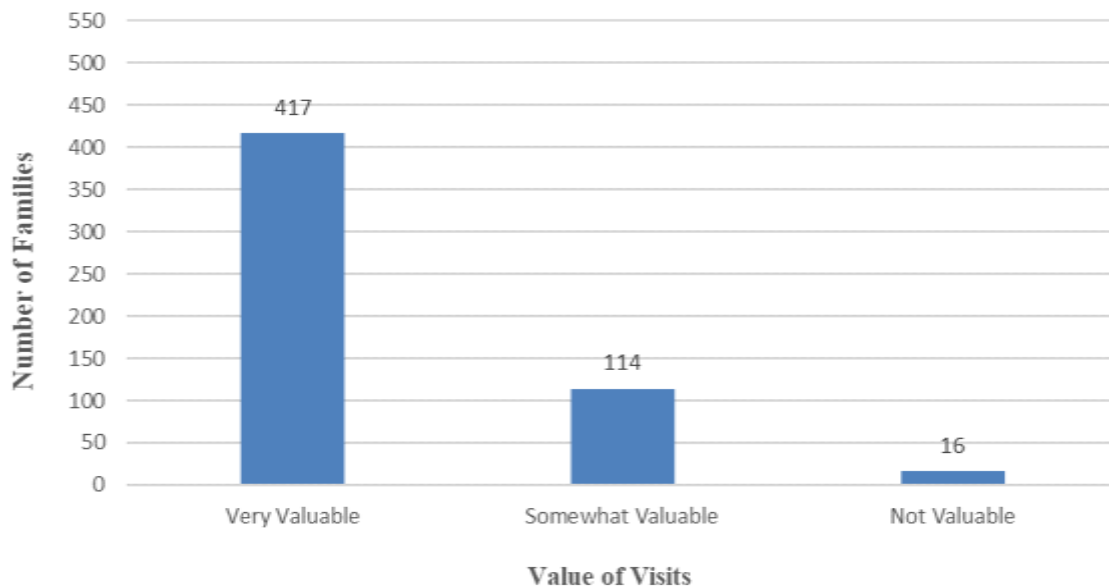


Figure 4. How valuable was the teacher home visit?

Figure 5 shows the majority of parents also felt the teacher home visits were very comfortable.

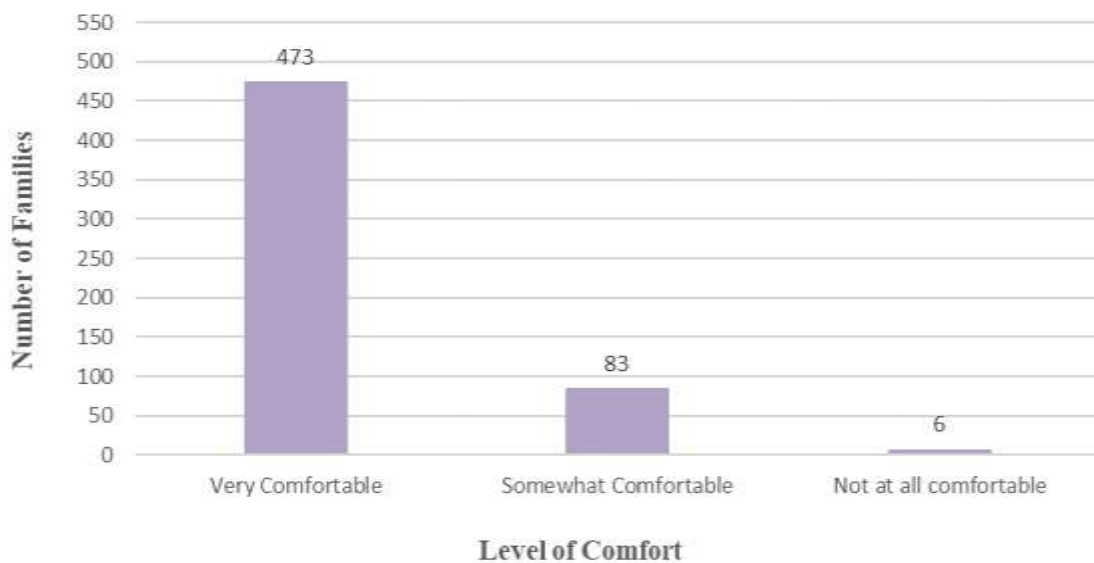


Figure 5. How comfortable were the home visits?

A *t*-test was applied to each statement to find the significant difference between parents participating in the Home Works! Program and parents not participating in the Home Works! Program. A significant positive difference in the means of participants (PHW) and non-participants (PN) at the 0.05 level was found for the following statements:

- My involvement in my children's education has improved their achievement.
- The school values and respects differences among students and their families.
- My children are given a fair chance to succeed at school.
- I feel my children are safe at school.
- This school suggests ways I can help my children learn at home.
- I am a partner with the school in my children's education.
- My children's teachers are good teachers.
- This school encourages parents to be involved.
- I take my children to the library or buy them books. (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014, p. 7)

The survey results indicated parents participating in the Home Works! Program reported more involvement with their child's school. In the results of the parent surveys, lower numbers indicated a higher amount of involvement. According to the parent survey results, parents who participated in the Home Works! Program responded with significantly lower means for the following statements:

- Contacted your children's teacher.
- Visited the school on your own.



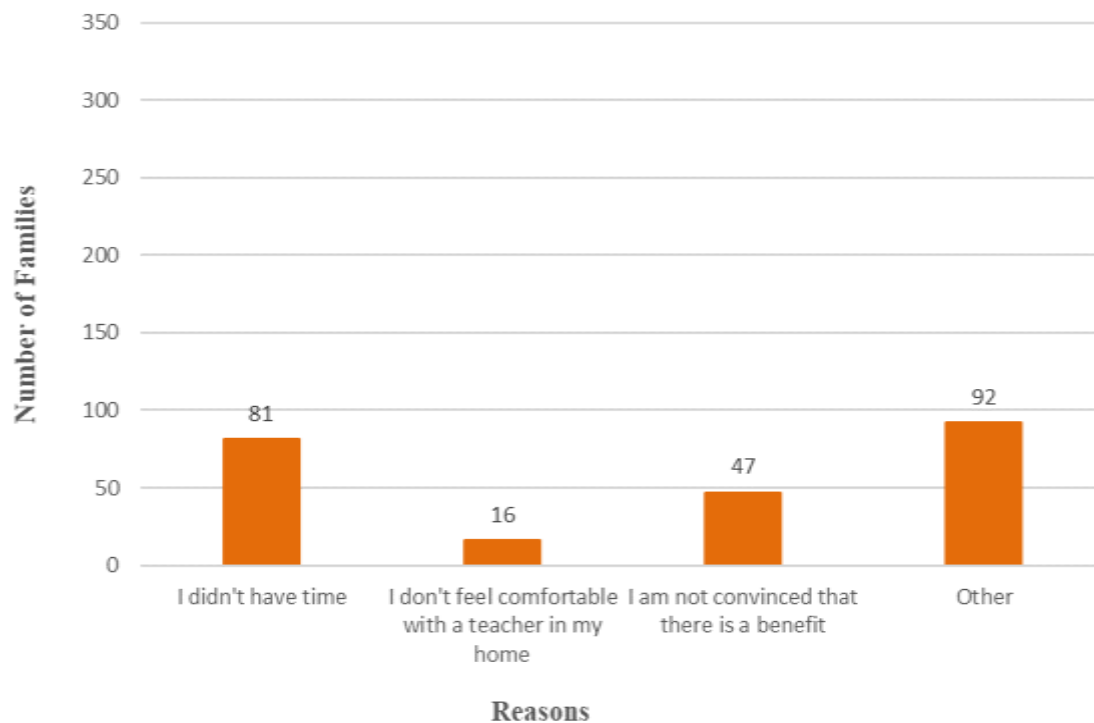
- Attended/helped with school activities. (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014, p. 7)

When asked about communication between home and school, parents participating in the Home Works! Program agreed with the following statements significantly more than non-participating parents:

- The teachers contact me when they have concerns with my children's academic performance.
- The teachers contact me when they have concerns about my children's behavior.
- The teachers' contact me when my children have done something well.
- I contact the teacher when I have concerns about my children's academic performance.
- I contact the teacher when I have concerns about my children's behavior.

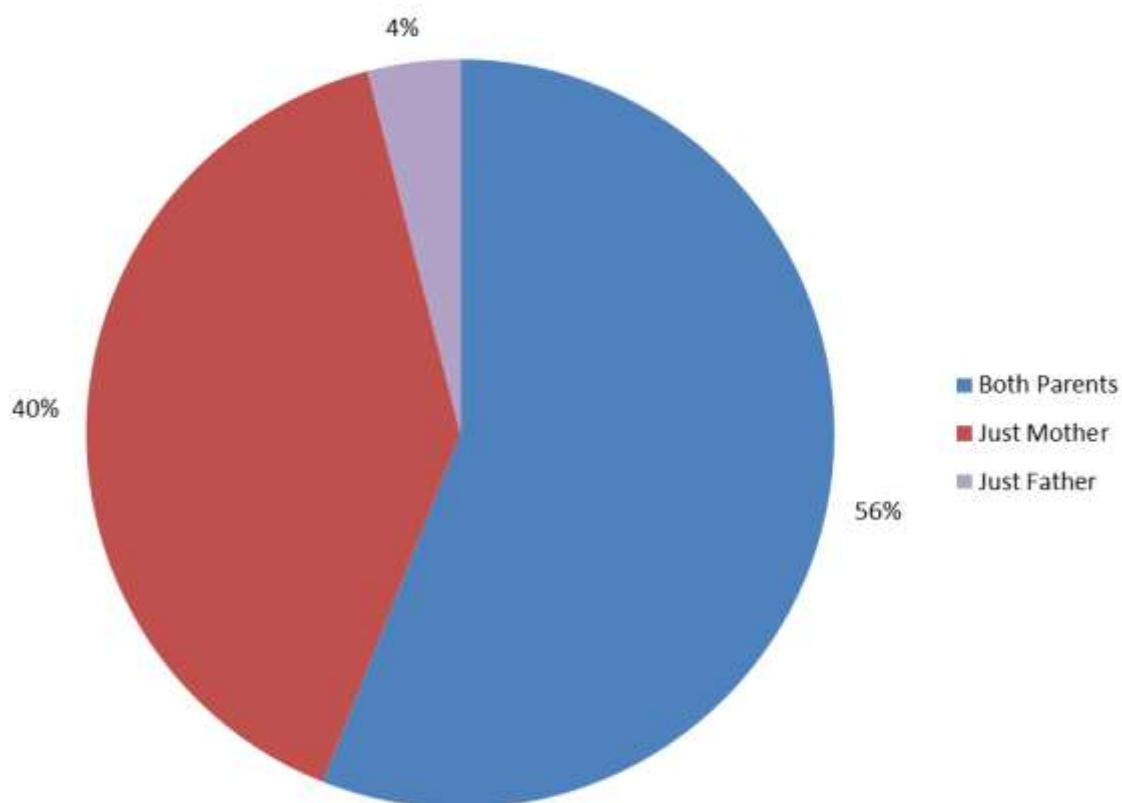
(University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014, pp. 7-8)

Parents who chose not to participate in the Home Works! Program were given different choices as to why they did not participate (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Reasons why parents chose not to participate in the teacher home visit program.

School children in grades three to five answered six questions regarding their personal demographics. One question was about which parent lives in the home (see Figure 7).



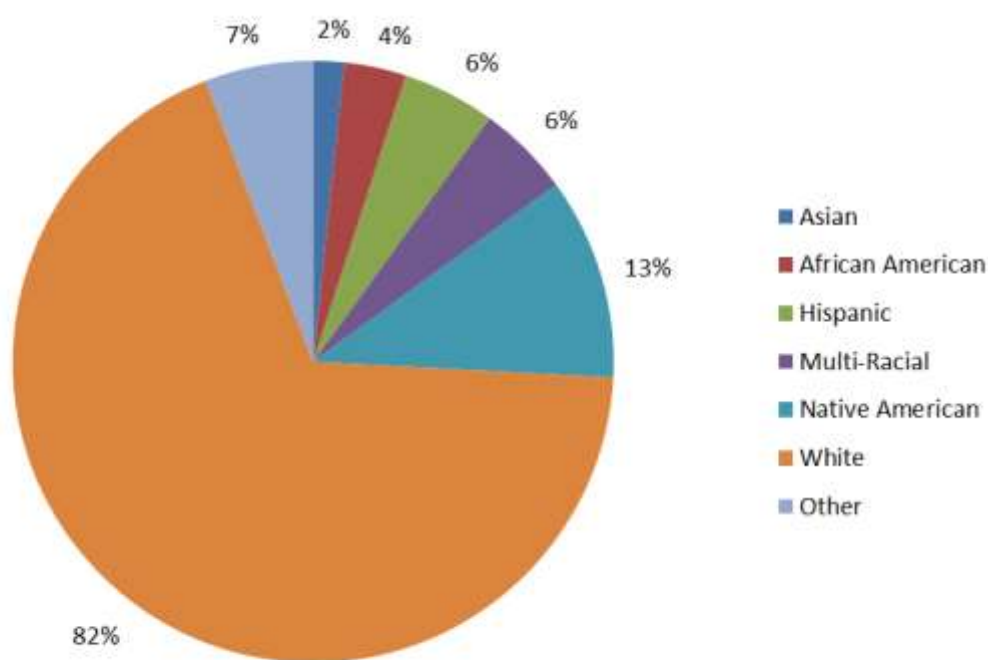
*Figure 7.* Parents living in the home with participants of the Home Works! Program.

The majority of students participating in the teacher home visit program live with both parents in the home. However, the majority of students not participating in the teacher home visit program live in single-parent homes (51%). These data beg the question, is the teacher home visit program really meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged students?

The additional survey data indicated 856 students in grades three, four, and five completed the survey. Sixty-two of the students reported receiving a teacher home visit either this year or last year. Many of these students received a visit both years, with 54%

receiving a visit this year and 37% receiving a visit last year (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014, p. 16).

The demographics of this population included 56% male students with 62% in the third grade, 12% in the fourth grade, and 24% in the fifth grade. Of the male students, 85% identified as White, 43% identified as African-American, 3% identified as Hispanic, 9% identified as Native American, and 4% identified as multi-racial. The survey was also sent to students in grades six to 12; however, the data show no responses were reported from students in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grades. The data revealed 350 students completed the survey. Fifty-five of them reported participating in the teacher home visit program. Forty-eight percent were male and 52% were female. English was spoken in the majority of the homes (98%). Ethnicity is displayed in Figure 8.



*Figure 8.* Ethnicity reported by sixth-ninth graders completing the Home Works! Program.

When the students were asked what parents were involved in their day-to-day home lives, they responded with the data in Figure 9.

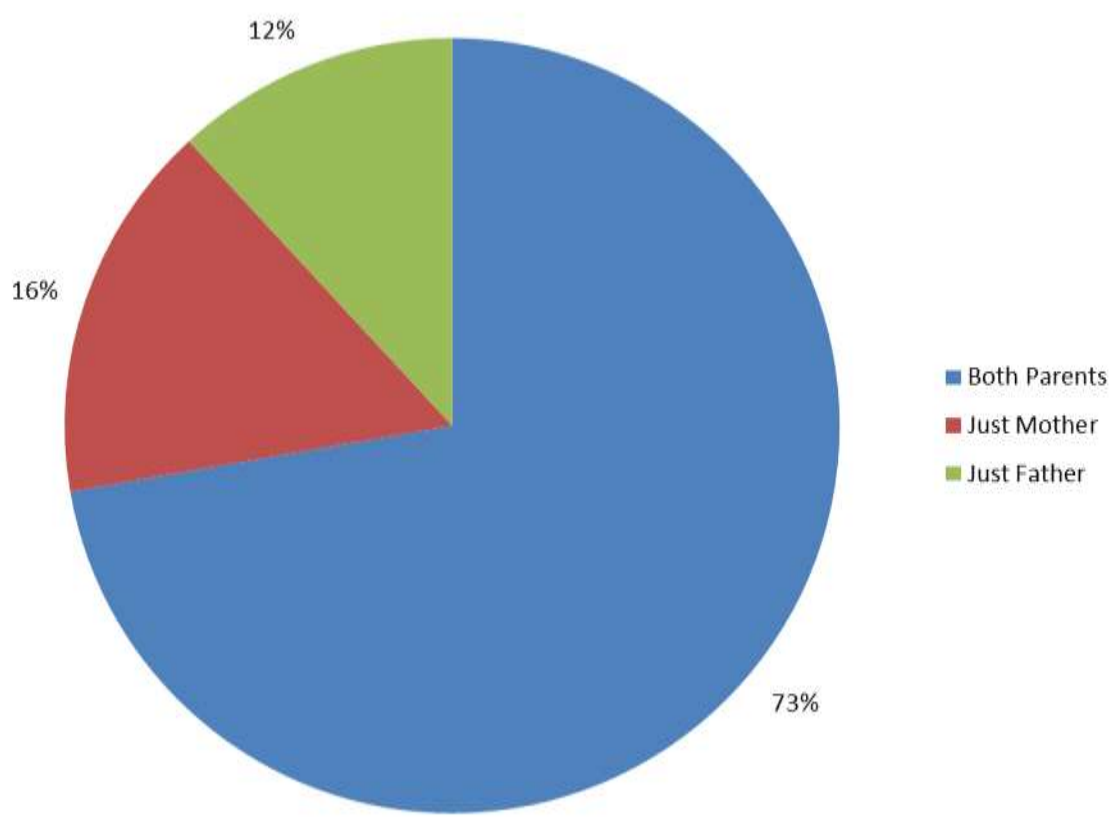


Figure 9. Parents involved in their student’s day-to-day life.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the analyses of the teacher focus groups and principal interview were revealed, as well as the results from the parent survey. Five themes emerged from the focus group and principal interview analysis. Upon further review of the data, two themes were merged, resulting in four themes reported.

The four themes included building relationships, diversity and safety, parent involvement, and the impact of teacher home visits on students' future success. Building relationships was the most prevalent theme from the focus groups and principal interview. Veteran teachers expressed how crucial it is to build relationships with families outside of school. The new teachers appeared surprised by what the home visits revealed about students and their families, and the principal cited this theme as the reason for initiating the teacher home visit program.

Diversity was unexpected, because diversity to the focus groups and principal meant the socioeconomic status of families as opposed to race. Both focus groups were concerned about safety and expressed why they were fearful and what types of situations had occurred while conducting their visits. However, the principal did not express concerns about teachers going into students' homes.

The third theme was parent involvement; both focus groups and the principal appreciated the importance of parent involvement in education. Both focus groups expressed how they had seen a difference in the amount of academic help the students were receiving at home. One teacher also stated parents were willing to call her if they had questions or concerns.

The last theme was impact on student futures. Some of the focus group members believed the relationship-building the home visits allowed would impact their students' futures. Other members of the focus groups were not sure how far-reaching the home visits would be.

The parent survey was conducted by the University of Missouri-St. Louis and resulted in secondary data. The results of the survey showed parents participating in the

program felt it was a valuable component of their child's academic success. For parents not participating in the program, time was the biggest reason for not participating.

In Chapter Five, a summary of the overall study is presented. The findings from the data are explained, and the perceptions of the stakeholders are discussed. The conclusions allowed the researcher to answer the research questions with support from the focus groups, the principal interview, and the parent and student surveys. The conclusions were supported by the findings of the literature review. The implications for practice and suggestions from the researcher for future case studies are explained. Finally, recommendations for future research were determined and are reviewed in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions**

The intent of this mixed-method study was to identify teacher home visit programs initiated across the country in order to determine if the cost and time involved make a significant difference in student achievement, increased student attendance, and decreased student discipline referrals. This study was conducted to discover the similarities and differences in perceptions of a group of stakeholders (parents, administrators, teachers, and students) participating in teacher home visit programs. The researcher discovered each teacher home visit program included different professional development opportunities, expectations, and teacher stipends.

Parental involvement is essential to the academic success of students (Patton, 2015). Through the course of this study, information was gathered about the teacher home visit program in one school district, including what was successful and what was lacking based on perceptions of a variety of stakeholders in that district. If teacher home visits work, they would be beneficial for other schools not currently participating in a teacher home visit program. Administrators should at least explore teacher home visit programs currently used in different school districts and consider initiating a program as part of their overall plan to involve parents.

Schools continuously work to increase student achievement. They try new curriculum, increase teacher professional development, and create more opportunities to get parents into the school building but with little change (Castelluccio, 2015). By using Lezotte's (2012) work on the importance of home-school-community relationships and



parent involvement as a framework to construct this study, the elements associated with effective schools were appropriate to establish the literature review and resulting themes.

The literature related to this study was significant, as different studies have been initiated across the country to determine the importance and impact of teacher home visits as well as the importance of fidelity in a teacher home visit program (Hill, 2013). Training essentials and tips were suggested through the literature (St. Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014).

### **Findings**

The data for this study originated from two teacher focus groups, a principal interview, and parent surveys. Four themes emerged from the focus groups and principal interview: building relationships, diversity and safety, parent involvement, and impact on student futures. The parent survey data were obtained via a secondary resource. The majority of families participating in the teacher home visit program were white and from two-parent families. The highest level of education for the majority of participating families was some college, technology school, or an associate's degree. The most common household income level of participants was over \$70,000, followed closely by \$20,000-\$29,000.

Parents participating in the teacher home visit program asserted their involvement in their child's education improved achievement. They also reported they believed the school valued and respected differences among students and their families. The families also affirmed they were more willing to contact their child's teacher and visited the school more often following home visits.

## Conclusions

**Research question one.** What are the perceptions of teachers in one urban school regarding the teacher home-visit program? When the qualitative data were open-coded, themes emerged regarding the perceptions of teachers in the study. The first theme was building relationships. While family engagement has become an important strategy, proponents of teacher home visits feel the visits give teachers a greater understanding of their students' homes (Meyer, 2013). This was the most prominent theme that came from this study, as the teachers recognized the importance and advantage of home visits.

One focus group teacher asserted building a relationship with parents gives the teacher insight into what is happening in the home and allows educators to understand what the students need from them. The most influential environments where children's learning and development occur are home and school (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). A first-year teacher in the study noted the teacher home visits allow her and her students' parents to become a "team," where it is no longer what she wants as a teacher or what they want as parents, but what they all want for the student to be successful.

In the nation today, building meaningful parent-teacher relationships and viewing the teacher and parent as co-educators who share responsibility for the students' education is imperative for student success (NEA, 2012). A novice teacher noted home visits allow her to set goals for students and to work together, communicate, and collaborate with parents to make that happen. Carson and Wood (2015) found parents learn more than just how their students are doing in school; they learn what students are learning and what they as parents can do at home to support that learning.

Several of the teachers in the study believed building a relationship with families allows them to discuss issues they could not have conferred about before the home visits. The teachers also noted families would not have been willing to discuss issues had they not bonded through the teacher home visits. Parents are willing to share family stories, as well as fears and dreams they have for their children, during home visits (Castelluccio, 2015).

The focus group members also believed teacher home visits help parents and students trust the teacher in general. The teachers recognized there are lots of times parents and students do not trust the school or teachers. Zagier (2013) found students often view school and home as two different worlds, but when a bridge is created through a teacher home visit, the two different worlds become more unified.

Understanding the infrastructure of the home and gaining insight about the family was imperative to one teacher. Teacher home visits allow teachers to observe the interaction of parents and students within their home; moreover, this helps the teacher gain a more realistic picture of students and their home life (Meyer, 2013). The information gained helped the teacher create lesson plans with each student in mind. While building relationships with families is crucial, home visits help build relationships with students as well (Raymond, 2015).

A new teacher to the teacher home visit program found students know teachers care about them because teachers come to their homes; teachers see their rooms, where they live, and their relationships with their families. Kronolz (2016) shared, “Students open up to a teacher who has seen their bedroom or patted their dog” (p. 5). These visits gave the teacher a broader base of knowledge about the student and gave the teacher and

student a personal connection in the classroom. Students are more willing to share their needs or their parents' needs with a teacher when the bridge between home and school has been built (NEA, 2012).

A veteran teacher found the visits can improve students' self-esteem and academics because they want to try harder in the classroom. Jung and Sheldon (2015) found students who receive home visits are more likely to attend school and achieve or exceed grade-level reading comprehension expectations. One veteran teacher stated when students know the teacher cares; they just seem to show up more in class.

Another theme noted in the qualitative data was diversity. Diversity for participants in this study did not refer to race issues as much as socioeconomic issues. Teachers were surprised at the conditions in which some of their students live. One teacher noted it is difficult to see people living with less than her own family, and she tried to imagine her children living in those conditions. Teachers' perceptions of a family's background, socioeconomic status, and race can have a negative impact on their ability to build strong relationships with students' families (Sewell, 2012).

When the focus groups were asked how they handle cultural differences between themselves and their students, they collectively viewed the question from a broader sense and more along the lines of socioeconomic status. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), in 2014, approximately 20% of school-age children were in families living in poverty. One teacher stated it is difficult to see people living with less than her own family, and she tried to imagine her own children in those conditions. She noted it helped her understand her students' needs and what they need from her based on what her own kids have.

According to Henry et al. (2013), children living in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to have a lower level of school performance. They are also more likely to experience academic and behavioral problems (Henry et al. 2013). The teachers in both focus groups insisted handling those situations with unconditional positive regard and treating everybody the same no matter what allowed the parents to feel at ease about having the teachers visit their homes. One veteran teacher noted although teachers see things at school, they are not able to truly understand the students' lives outside of school until they are in the home.

A new teacher to the teacher home visit program stated she really wanted to visit her students' homes. However, she knew she had to show up to the homes and feel comfortable regardless of whether their cleanliness standards were the same as hers or not. It was important to the focus group teachers that the families participating in the teacher home visit program not feel judged or criticized. Sewell (2012) emphasized teacher perceptions of a family's background, socioeconomic status, and race can have a negative impact on their ability to build strong relationships with students' families.

Several teachers in the focus groups admitted to being nervous about making home visits due to fear for their own safety. They pushed through their fears and conducted the majority of the home visits. As one veteran teacher noted, "I just hoped for the best. Even though it can, at times, be uncomfortable, I still want to visit the home." However, the veteran teachers were less apprehensive about the visits than the new teachers.

One first-year teacher to the home visit program explained, "Because you are going at night and as the year goes on it is dark, so you never know what situation you

are going to walk into in the home even though they know you are coming.” The same teacher felt even though the family is expecting her for the visit, she did not know what had been going on that day or who to expect to be in the home when she arrived.

One focus group teacher shared she arrived at a student’s home to find the police there. Another teacher had the door answered by a parent holding an axe, and another teacher claimed when she arrived for the home visit a gun was lying on the kitchen table. Nix et al. (2012) found the biggest challenge teachers’ face prior to making home visits is the “fear of the unknown” (p. 35). The safety of teachers is always a concern for school administrators; “teachers working in urban schools are more likely to report direct and indirect exposure to assaults, shootings, gang conflict and drug related crimes” (Koblinsky & Maring, 2013, p. 379).

Parent involvement was another theme discovered from the data. The opportunities schools offer for parent involvement may very well not match the “family’s life situations, expectations, or desired roles” (Fehrer, 2014, p. 3). The focus group teachers explained as part of the teacher home visit program, they are required to invite the family, after the first visit, to a parent dinner hosted by the school. These dinners are provided as an opportunity for parents to meet each other, as well as to visit with other teachers and administrators in the building. The dinners are organized so families begin to feel more comfortable in the school building and have a better sense of belonging. The administrators and teachers hope the dinners will encourage families to visit the school more with or without an invite. Parents are able to have positive communication with the teacher and school (Michigan Department of Education, 2015; Smith, 2013), and they feel more comfortable going to their child’s school and being a part of it (Zagier, 2013).

A veteran teacher noted although the parents she has visited have not been in the school building more, she has seen better parental help with homework. Another veteran teacher explained parents are more supportive of homework and classroom procedures and are willing to work with their kids at home. Based on the findings of the Michigan Department of Education (2015), parent expectations of their child's academic attainment are one of the most consistent predictors of their child's academic achievement and social adjustment.

One of the first-year teachers felt parents are more likely to call her if they do not understand the homework or they have concerns about grades. She stated that is different than her experience with parents who do not participate in the teacher home visit program. The NEA (2012) found teachers feel more comfortable picking up the phone and parents feel more comfortable calling to talk to teachers because together they can solve more problems than they can alone.

The impact on students' futures was another theme that emerged from the teacher focus groups. The majority of focus group participants believed the teacher home visit program will impact students now and in the future. One teacher believed teacher home visits make students feel more comfortable with teachers and authority figures and ultimately help them advocate for their own needs.

A veteran teacher noted the teacher home visit program allows teachers to build rapport with parents which impacts the way students view everyone working together as a team for their benefit. The program allows parents and students to trust the teacher and other school officials, which can be beneficial as a student grows and changes teachers

throughout the school career. A student may look back later and think, “That teacher really cared about me enough to visit my home and build a relationship with my family.”

A new teacher hoped the home visit planted a little seed in the student’s head that school is a safe and positive place. Regardless of what parents say about the teacher or school district, the students know there are people in the building who want them to be successful. The staff want to hear from parents, their hopes and dreams for their student, and then discuss how the school and the parents can work together to help each student achieve success (Ferlazzo, 2011; Jiles, 2015; O’Neil, 2014).

One teacher stated as much as teachers and administrators want the teacher home visit to impact students, some expressed the impact is reliant upon the parents’ perspective of not only the program but the school as well. Beatty (2013) explained, “Attention to the links among parents, communities, and schools encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education” (p. 73).

**Research question two.** What are the perceptions of the principal of one urban school regarding the teacher home visit program? Four themes were discovered through the coding phase of the qualitative data analysis. Building relationships was the most prevalent theme, and the building principal stated the reason for initiating the teacher home visit program in his school was the need to build relationships and form bonds between the teachers and parents.

Teacher home visits not only assist in building relationships between schools and home, they also help in building the community as a whole (Bempechat and Shernoff, 2012). The principal also believed the teacher home visits could and would continue to build a trust system that improves the overall sense of community in the school as well as



the morale of the building staff and the families they serve every day. In a report from The United States Department of Education (2014):

The relationship between home and school serves as the foundation for shared learning and responsibility and also acts as an incentive an motivating agent for the continued to participating of families and staff and participants are more willing to learn from others whom they respect and trust. (p. 9)

The second theme was diversity and safety. The principal, when asked if he had received pushback from teachers regarding the teacher home visit program and fears of visiting student homes, stated he had not. He went on to explain, “We live in a somewhat rural area with a majority of children living in poverty, so our teachers had no qualms with going out and visiting families to make that connection and help families with other resources as needed.” Although the principal felt the teachers did not worry about their safety during home visits, a first year teacher commented, “Because you are going at night and as the year goes on it is dark, so you never know what situation you are going to walk into in the home even though they know you are coming.”

The third theme found was parent involvement. The principal, when asked if he had seen a surge of parent involvement in school activities, responded it was difficult to say because the school already had 90% of parents participating in the teacher home visit program attending school activities. He also stated he had seen more parents come through the school doors since the teacher home visits started than he had previously.

The fourth theme was impact on students’ futures. The principal believed socially and emotionally a student’s well-being is significant and they are building relationships with adults in the schools and having conversations with their teacher. The principal also

felt parents and students know their teachers care about them because they come to their homes. Stuht (2009) stated:

Home-visits are not only key for parents and teachers in building communication with each other, but the students become more motivated after home visits, resulting in higher achievement, reduced student misbehavior, increased parent involvement, and greater grass roots interest in school reform. (p. 24)

The principal believed home visits are really good for the students' self-esteem. The visits open the eyes of students and how they see their teachers. Lezotte (2012) and his team of researchers found family and schools must work together to bridge the gap between home and school for students to be successful. During the principal interview, he was asked to rate the following areas on a scale of 1-5 (1=no improvement, 5=greatest improvement).

- Attendance: 4 = "There are many factors that affect attendance but you can't deny the fact that we are coming in at the 92% on our overall attendance rate."
- Achievement: 4 = "Everything pieces together, all the oars going in the same direction and the teacher home visit program is a large part of that boat moving in the right direction."
- Behavior: 3 = "Behaviors are kind of different because kids not receiving home visits are doing well as well as students receiving home visits."
- Overall school and home communication: 4 = "Again it goes back to the boat, there are so many things in play that help make our school successful, but the teacher home visit program is a large part of our success."

**Research question three.** What are the parents' overall experiences of the teacher home-visit program in one urban school? The results of this research question come from the secondary data collected by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Education Department. They conducted a parent survey which was disseminated by the building principals.

The parent survey results revealed parents participating in the teacher home visit program believed their involvement in their child's education had improved achievement in school. Kilgore (2014) found the opportunity to bridge the gap between schools and families through home visits enables students to increase their chances of success in school. Parent expectations of their child's academic attainment are one of the most consistent predictors of their child's academic achievement and social adjustment (Michigan Department of Education, 2015).

Parents believed the school valued and respected the differences among students and their families and they believed their child was given a fair chance to succeed at school. The participating parents also knew their child felt safe at school and the school would suggest ways to help their child. The parents reported their child's teachers were good teachers.

Benefits of the teacher home visit program include teachers and parents having opportunities to talk and collaborate about the child's education (Sewell, 2012). It is also about teachers having a knowledge base of the student's home life and how that home life can impact the classroom (Project Appleseed, 2016; Sewell, 2012). One father noted after a home visit, "The kids see the parents and the teacher interacting, they see our relationship, they see we're working together" (Kronolz, 2016, p. 5).

Parents participating in the teacher home visit program shared they are more willing to contact their child's teacher, visit the school on their own, and help with homework. The participating parents also reported their student's teacher would contact them with concerns about academic performance, or behavior, or when the child had done something well. Researchers have argued benefits of teacher home visit programs may include the following: parents being more likely to become involved in their student's school activities, parents taking on volunteering opportunities, and students realizing they have the support of their parents as well as their teacher (Michigan Department of Education, 2015; Project Appleseed, 2016).

### **Implications for Practice**

Because one of the correlates in Lezotte's (2012) work was home-school relationships and parent involvement, school districts should determine if a teacher home visit program is necessary and equitable for their stakeholders. School districts need to evaluate their reasoning behind a teacher home visit program. The research in this study indicated there are many variables involved in a successful teacher home visit program. Teacher home visit programs are currently in practice across the country and may offer different perspectives for districts to consider.

Having an open dialogue with teachers is necessary to determine buy-in of the program which will establish whether the program would be beneficial to initiate. If a district decides to pursue a teacher home visit program, allowing teachers to have a voice in the program chosen may help to get them on-board and excited about the program. Teachers and administrators need to understand the training needed in order for the program to be successful.

Districts must consider the school population they serve. Families living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet may seem, to teachers and administrators, like they do not care about their students' success in school, when they actually care very much (Badger, 2014). Working families, struggling to put food on the table and a roof over their families' heads, take precedence over everything else (Badger, 2014).

These findings reveal communication between administrators and teachers is a priority for teacher home visit programs to be successful. During the focus groups, teachers admitted they experienced fear for their own safety while visiting families in homes. Yet, the principal was unaware of those concerns and stated his teachers did not have concerns or reservations about the home visits.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies of teacher home visit programs should focus on comparing teacher home visit programs across the country. These programs could be examined to determine how they are the same and how they are different. Perhaps a study would be beneficial to determine which program has the most impact in regard to increasing student achievement, decreasing discipline referrals, and increasing school attendance.

Also, future research studies should be designed to answer the following questions regarding teacher home visit programs. What training does each program recommend and/or provide to teachers and school staff? Does the training focus on building relationships with the families or on academics? Does the program include time for teacher reflection and collaboration among teachers conducting home visits? What stipends do the different programs offer to participating teachers? Do the different

teacher home visit programs have a plan to ensure fidelity through each school year?  
Does the program encourage teachers to conduct home visits with a buddy teacher?

While this research study used a parent survey to determine parent satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the teacher home visit program, this researcher would highly recommend future studies consider a parent focus group as part of the research. The parent survey in this study allowed parents to rate different aspects of the program using a Likert scale, but it did not allow the parents to voice their opinions about likes and/or dislikes of the program itself. A parent focus group would give parents that opportunity, which would be critical in determining a program's success or failure.

Although this study included two focus groups and one principal interview, the information obtained was limited to one school building. Further studies should include focus groups and principal interviews at multiple school buildings in different parts of the country. This expansion would allow for more insight into teacher and principal thoughts, fears, and possible recommendations for further studies.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a teacher home visit program impacted student success in one school. This study was also initiated to determine if student discipline referrals decreased and student attendance increased. This study was designed to discover the perceptions of two teacher focus groups, one with seven veteran teachers of the teacher home visit program and one with seven new teachers participating in the teacher home visit program. The focus group questions were created by the researcher and were formed as open-ended questions to provoke open dialogue among the participants of a teacher home visit program.

This study included one building principal interview to determine his perceptions of his role in the teacher home visit program. The interview questions were similar to the focus group questions; however, one question, created as a Likert scale, was used to receive an overall perception of the teacher home visit and its effect in different areas.

Secondary data, which were used as the quantitative component of the study, were compiled by the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The data were elicited from parent and student surveys completed by participants and nonparticipants of a teacher home visit program and were used to determine parent perceptions of the teacher home visit program.

Focus group responses and the principal interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using open and axial coding. The coding revealed themes throughout the data. The themes were supported by the literature review of this study. The data from the study revealed teacher home visit programs are perceived to assist schools in building relationships with families.

Teacher home visit programs were determined to be somewhat beneficial to school districts in regard to increasing student achievement, decreasing discipline referrals, and increasing student school attendance. The literature review exposed different programs using different modalities to train teachers, support teachers, and pay teachers for visiting homes of students. Sedelmyer (2016) expressed the importance of preparing teachers for what they might see in homes.

Sedelmyer (2016) conveyed the significance of holding discussions about cultural differences as well as the importance of listening and capacity-building. The findings from this study confirm earlier research from the literature review that teacher

home visit programs elicit better communication between school and home as well as assist in building relationships that benefit student success (Kilgore, 2014). The literature also revealed the success of the program is dependent upon strong training for teachers.

The United States Department of Education (2013) reported, “For schools and districts across the United States, family engagement is rapidly shifting from a low-priority recommendation to an integral part of the education reform efforts” (p. 5). School attempts to engage parents through open houses, math nights, pancake dinners, etc. will reach some parents, but for those parents with different work schedules, childcare issues, and misconceptions about schools, those attempts are futile (Patton, 2015).

The overall perceptions of the focus groups and principal were positive toward the teacher home visit program. The teachers felt they were building relationships with their student’s families they would not have been able to do prior to the implementation of the program. The majority of them were excited to visit the homes of their students because so much information about each student and his/her family was obtained. This information helped them understand students’ backgrounds, needs they or their family may have, and dreams their families have for them. This information also helped teachers when creating lesson plans. The teachers found homework was done more often, and if parents did not understand something the student brought home, the parents were more apt to call the teacher and ask questions.

Likewise, if a student was having issues at school, the teacher felt more comfortable calling home and having honest conversations with parents. Members of the focus groups and the building principal were in support of teacher home visits. However,



the focus groups expressed concerns about their safety when visiting students' homes in the evenings when it was dark outside.

Teacher home visits are opportunities for teachers, students, and their families to build lifelong relationships. Several positive effects of teacher home visits have been revealed in this study. Research has shown students need to stay in school and get an education in order to enter a very competitive workforce (McCree, 2015). One way to ensure students stay in school is parent involvement in education. Parent involvement can assist in building a bridge between school and home. The bridge allows parents and teachers to co-teach and communicate with each other to ensure the success of all students.

## Appendix A

# LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: September 8, 2014  
TO: Melissa Lucas  
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Families  
IRB Proposal IRB REFERENCE #: [635277-1]  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: **APPROVED**  
APPROVAL DATE: September 8, 2014  
EXPIRATION DATE: September 8, 2015  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has **APPROVED** your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form.

Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All **SERIOUS** and **UNEXPECTED** adverse events must be reported to this office. Please

use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of September 8, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Robyne Elder at (314) 566-4884 or [relder@lindenwood.edu](mailto:relder@lindenwood.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to [IRB@lindenwood.edu](mailto:IRB@lindenwood.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

## Appendix B

Re: Teacher Home Visit Parent Survey

Page 1 of 2

**Re: Teacher Home Visit Parent Survey**

Summers, Jenna K. (UMSL-Student) [jksxt5@mail.umsi.edu]

Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2014 1:04 PM

To: Lucas, Melissa

Cc: Kapp, Julie M. [kappj@umsi.edu]

Hi Missy,

1. The parent surveys are conducted online or in paper format. The link is sent to the principals to distribute. Frequently, the link is sent home on a piece of paper attached to a paper copy of the survey. When I get the surveys back, I can let you know what the program did this year.
2. The surveys are to be taken individually.

Please let me know if you have any other questions!

Thanks!

-Jenna

Jenna K. Summers

School Psychology Candidate

Graduate Student Evaluator for HOME WORKS!

Partnership for Evaluation, Assessment, and Research (PEAR)

<http://pear.umsi.edu>

University of Missouri - St. Louis

[jksxt5@mail.umsi.edu](mailto:jksxt5@mail.umsi.edu)

cell: 618-531-9719

**From:** [Lucas, Melissa](#)

**Sent:** Sunday, March 23, 2014 10:14 AM

**To:** [Jenna Summers](#)

**Cc:** [Julie Kapp](#)

Hi Jenna,

My name is Melissa (Missy) Lucas and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I am currently working on my IRB and since I would like to include the parent survey data as a secondary resource I need additional information regarding the parent surveys to complete it.

1. How are the parent surveys conducted? mail, electronic mail, phone calls, etc.
2. Are all participating parents in the Teacher Home Visit Program surveyed as a whole group or are individual school participants?

## Appendix C

# LINDENWOOD

## INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

“Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Families Through Teacher Home Visits”

Principal Investigator Melissa Ann Lucas

Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

- 
1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Melissa A. Lucas under the guidance of Dr. Sherry DeVore, Dr. Terry Reid, and Dr. Lisa Christiansen. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of teacher home visits on student achievement.
  2. Your participation will involve:
    - a) A 30-minute interview.
    - b) You will decide the date and time of the interview according to your schedule.
  3. The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 30 minutes. One principal and 10-14 teachers involved in the teacher home visits will be asked to participate in this study.
  4. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
  5. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about teacher home visit programs and may help develop a system of best practices among these educational programs.

6. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
  
7. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
  
8. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Melissa A. Lucas, or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore, at [REDACTED]. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name          Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator          Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Letter

Dear Principal or Teacher,

This is an invitation to participate in a survey for a research study entitled, “*Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Families Through Teacher Home Visits.*” I am completing this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctorate in Educational Administration through Lindenwood University. Attached are the focus group questions. On the day of the interviews, I will bring a paper copy of the letter of consent for you to sign. Also attached is a copy of the interview questions for your perusal.

Thank you,

Melissa (Missy) Lucas  
Doctoral Candidate  
Lindenwood University

## Appendix E

### Focus Group Questions

#### First-Year Teacher Questions:

1. What was your perception of the Teacher Home Visit Program prior to your participation?
2. What concerns, if any, did you have regarding your safety?
3. What do you feel has been the biggest impact of the Teacher Home Visit Program?
4. How have you handled cultural differences between you and students' families?
5. Do you feel teacher home visits will impact students' futures? If so, how?

#### Veteran Teacher Questions:

1. What additional knowledge have you gained from the Teacher Home Visit Program?
2. What concerns, if any, have you had regarding your safety?
3. How have you handled the cultural differences, if any, between you and the families you visit?
4. Have you noticed a change in parent involvement in the school building?
5. How do you see the Teacher Home Visit Program impacting students' futures?
6. Would you recommend participation in this program to other teachers? Why or why not?



## Appendix F

### Principal Interview Questions

1. What was the purpose of initiating the Teacher Home Visit Program in your school?
2. For this question, please using the rating scale 1-5 to show an improvement in the following areas: (1 is no improvement – 5 is greatest improvement)
  - a. Attendance\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Achievement\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Behavior\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Overall school and home communication\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your perception of how the Teacher Home Visit Program will impact students' future endeavors?
4. Did you experience push back from teachers regarding the Teacher Home Visit Program, time constraints, and/or fears of visiting student homes?
5. Have you seen a surge of parent involvement in school activities?
6. Have there been issues with cultural differences between families and visiting teachers?

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### **Vita**

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Melissa received her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Columbia College in Columbia, Missouri, in 2004. She earned a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from William Woods University in 2007.